

THE INDEPENDENT

Tuesday 16 December 1997 45p (IR50p) No 3,483

Robinson plans a tax crackdown – on himself

Geoffrey Robinson, the millionaire businessman turned Treasury minister has blown the whistle on tax avoidance dodges – action that will add to his own tax bill. With the political storm still rumbling over his own family's offshore trust, Anthony Bevis, Political Editor, reports on a determined fightback.

Tony Blair believes that Mr Robinson has done no wrong and, because he is adding value to the Government with a business expertise that is delivering fruit on issues like the windfall tax and finance for London Underground, he is determined to keep him. *The Independent* has been told that Mr Robinson will be staying on as a Treasury minister.

But Mr Robinson is playing another, more discreet role – helping to plug the tax leaks that are exploited by rich businessmen like himself.

As Paymaster General, Mr Robinson has no direct tax responsibilities, apart from a review of corporation tax. However, he has intervened to guide colleagues on the ins-and-outs of tax avoidance – advice that will increase his own eventual tax liabilities, possibly by opening up the revenues from his Guernsey-based family trust to UK tax.

A senior Treasury source told *The Independent* last night that he had seen the internal working papers which showed Mr Robinson's contribution to a new crackdown expected in next spring's Budget.

A Treasury spokesman said last night: "Personal tax matters are the responsibility of the financial secretary, Dawn Primarolo, and the Chancellor makes all the final decisions."

But a Treasury insider confirmed the minister's role on work against tax avoidance, adding: "Geoffrey's decades of business experience have provided useful insights, not just with the highly-successful windfall tax – but more widely."

Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer, said in his July Budget: "The tax burden avoided by the few falls on the many". He then announced plans to curb tax abuses that will raise £1.7bn over four years. He also instructed the Inland Revenue to carry out a wide-ranging review of all tax avoidance, including the whole

approach to "the defeat and deterrence of tax-avoidance schemes".

Mr Brown said in a written Commons reply on Friday: "Both the Inland Revenue and Customs & Excise are also looking at the possibility of introducing a general anti-avoidance rule." Such a rule could make tax avoidance, like tax evasion, illegal.

In the Commons yesterday, Betty Boothroyd, the Speaker, warned Tory MPs not to "abuse and use" the proceedings of the House to get at Mr Robinson, after Peter Lilley, the shadow Chancellor, had complained that while Mr Robinson was refusing to answer Commons questions, he was giving interviews to newspapers.

Mr Lilley said earlier that new evidence had confirmed three charges against Mr Robinson – "charges of hypocrisy, of a conflict of interest and of being economical with the truth. He must start to give straight answers to the House of Commons – not half the story to selected journalists."

Specifically, Mr Lilley said that the Robinson family's Orion Trust had been set up after Labour had published its 1994 policy statement, *Tackling Tax Abuses*. He asked whether Mr Robinson had been involved in setting up the trust, and, if so, whether he had been aware that he was acting against party policy.

The Prime Minister's spokesman said Mr Robinson had done nothing wrong, and all the transactions relating to the trust had taken place before he became a minister. "The first principle is that the Prime Minister – nobody else – will decide who is in his government. The second point is that he builds a government based upon a variety of skills and background and insight and expertise that we require in a government."

"He believes that Geoffrey Robinson has brought and continues to bring an expertise in the world of business that gives us an added dimension in government, which has already borne fruit in relation to the windfall tax, some of the discussions we have had on coal, the public-private finance arrangements John Prescott is trying to put together."

But Paul Flynn, the outspoken Labour MP, told the BBC radio's *World at One*: "The dismay of many Labour MPs and Labour Party members at the moment is that the Government are giving this terrible impression that we are being tough on the disabled and tough on single parents but soft on millionaire tax avoiders."

Donald Macintyre, page 17



Come to the cabaret: A dancer from Club Tropicana prepares for the Cuban cabaret's first performance outside Havana in 58 years. The cast begin a world tour at the Royal Albert Hall in London in March. Yesterday some of the performers flew to Britain for a preview. Photograph: Tom Pilsner

INSIDE TODAY

When a man can't do it and a woman can't bear it

HEALTH/13



Too hot for his soup: The hippest new chef on the hob

FEATURE/15

From Mussolini to The Full Monty: Men stripping off

COMMENT/17



TELEVISION: The Eye, page 12
CROSSWORDS: Page 28 and
The Eye, page 9
WEATHER: The Eye, page 10

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TODAY'S NEWS

Greenland meteor goes to ground under icecap

A large meteor crashed into Greenland last week, but nobody is exactly sure where. Fishermen saw the night sky light up as bright as daylight as the object took just two seconds to flash across the sky, travelling at 10 times the speed of sound. It was the event of the century, but now it may have buried itself under the icecap – and it would take someone with Miss Smilla's feeling for snow to find it. Page 3

Cunningham mauls EU

The Agriculture Minister, Jack Cunningham, criticised "fraudulent" EU governments as he imposed a unilateral ban on the import of beef not conforming to stringent safety checks.

From midnight last night, strict new rules on deboning came into force in Britain. Mr Cunningham said his European counterparts had "prevaricated and obfuscated" to avoid new anti-BSE health controls. Page 8

Clark fails to get joke

The Tory MP Alan Clark was in the High Court claiming damages from the London Evening Standard over a spoof column, Alan Clark's Secret Political Diaries, which he claims is causing readers to believe it is actually written by him.

The newspaper is defending the column, written by one of its journalists, Peter Bradshaw, claiming it is a legitimate tease and that no one in their right minds would think it was written by Mr Clark. Page 3

Stephen Lawrence police weren't racists, just staggeringly incompetent

A report into the police investigation of the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence uncovered a large number of serious blunders. While the scale of the incompetence is staggering, says Jason Bennett, Crime Correspondent, the police have been cleared of racism.



Stephen Lawrence murdered in 1993

At least 11 potential leads went unchecked, according to the detectives examining the original Metropolitan Police inquiry into the stabbing of Stephen Lawrence four years ago. Potential witnesses and possibly vital evidence were ignored, and the investigation reveals a catalogue of lost opportunities and failures by Scotland Yard.

A preliminary report by the independent Police Complaints Authority is a damning indictment of the inquiry into the racist murder of Stephen, 18, who was stabbed to death at a bus stop near his home in Eltham, south-east London, by a gang of white youths in April 1993.

It concludes that there is "evidence of significant weaknesses, omissions and lost opportunities during the first murder inquiry". And it adds that the "serious shortcomings" were only uncovered because of the tenacity of Stephen's mother and father, Doreen and Neville, who brought a unsuccessful private prosecution and lobbied the Government.

Additionally, because an internal police inquiry failed to spot the earlier mistakes

lawfully killed during an unprovoked racist attack.

In one of the few positive points contained in yesterday's report, the PCA found no evidence of any racist conduct by officers involved in the investigation, which they said was well resourced. Detectives have been accused of giving the case low priority because Stephen was black.

However, the vast bulk of the findings are a scathing attack on the work of Scotland Yard. Among the mistakes were: • Several important "anonymous" informers were never identified by the Metropolitan Police and further questioned. However, the Kent officers were able to discover their names.

• Evidence about the identity of possible suspects was available early on, yet the police failed to arrest anyone and therefore lost the chance to obtain forensic evidence.

• The PCA report demolishes police claims that their attempts to track down Stephen's killers were hampered by a "wall of silence". It found "considerable evidence" that the people of Eltham had come forward with valuable information.

• A key witness withdrew his co-operation because of the way he was handled by detectives, and identification evidence was not properly analysed which may have resulted in at least one of the killers remaining undetected.

Sir Paul Condon, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, said yesterday that he accepted the main findings of the report and apologised to the Lawrence family. He added that lessons had been learnt.

"subsequent attempts to solve the crime have been hampered".

Also, despite identifying 11 "potentially fruitful lines of inquiry which have not yet been properly followed up", the PCA believes it is increasingly unlikely that the killers will ever be jailed as leads grow cold.

The unusual decision to publish the full details of the PCA findings, based on an inquiry carried out by detectives from Kent police force, were made on the order of Jack Straw, the Home Secretary. They will be submitted as evidence to the judicial inquiry into the murder which is due to begin in February.

The inquiry was set up after five white youths were branded "murderers" by a national newspaper following their refusal to give evidence at an inquest in February which found that Stephen had been un-

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COLUMN ONE

Social lepers only in new 'social exclusion unit'

Writing in this newspaper last week, Tony Blair announced the setting up of a new Social Exclusion Unit to help the underprivileged so that "each person no matter what their background should have the chance to succeed".

Yesterday, the Labour-run Glasgow City Council revealed its own idea of a Social Exclusion Unit in the form of a housing ghetto into which it will drive all tenants who it deems to have behaved anti-socially.

While the prime minister was trying to rescue what was left of his party's caring image during yesterday's social security debate in the Commons, the head of Glasgow's housing committee, James McCarron, was laying into "those who refuse to live normally".

He detailed plans to subject certain tenants to "resocialisation programmes" - including child psychology for their children - and called for central government to provide extra funding to pay for the initiative.

"What we're going to do with those people is marginalise them and if it has to be that they have to live in a ghetto, then so be it," he said.

"But I'm not going to tell decent people they've got to live beside drug dealers and hooligans. My sincere belief is that we could have an area where we could put those unfortunate people and rehabilitate them."

The councillor's comments will have caused embarrassment in Millbank where strategists will be anxious to correct the idea that the housing ghettos are part of the Government's national social programme.

But they illustrate the frustrations experienced by local authorities in dealing with the sharp end of urban deprivation.

Mr McCarron spoke out shortly after it was revealed that a multi-million pounds housing scheme, which had been approved by him as housing convener, is to be demolished. More than £2.7m had been spent on trying to rebuild one of Glasgow's most deprived areas, South Balornock. But 10 years after the project was completed, one part, Avonpark Street, is said to resemble a "war zone" after being systematically destroyed by local residents. The street is to be demolished at a further cost of £500,000.

Although Mr McCarron's proposal for "resocialisation" of tenants has not yet been approved by Glasgow council, a similar scheme has already been established in Dundee.

A housing estate has been set aside for council tenants who have proved to be anti-social and as part of their tenancy agreements, they must agree to take part in a rehabilitation programme. This includes youngsters working with child psychologists, drug addicts receiving counselling and flats surrounded by closed-circuit television cameras.

Mr McCarron, whose views can be heard tonight on BBC's *Fronline Scotland* programme, admitted it was a depressing vision for the future but said the South Balornock experience showed there was no alternative. "We have spent millions trying to transform poor and inadequate housing estates into homes which people should be proud of and this is how they repay us."

"If you're anti-social or a drug dealer, hopefully in the future we'll take you out and we'll take you into an area where we have child psychologists to deal with your kids and people to deal with you."

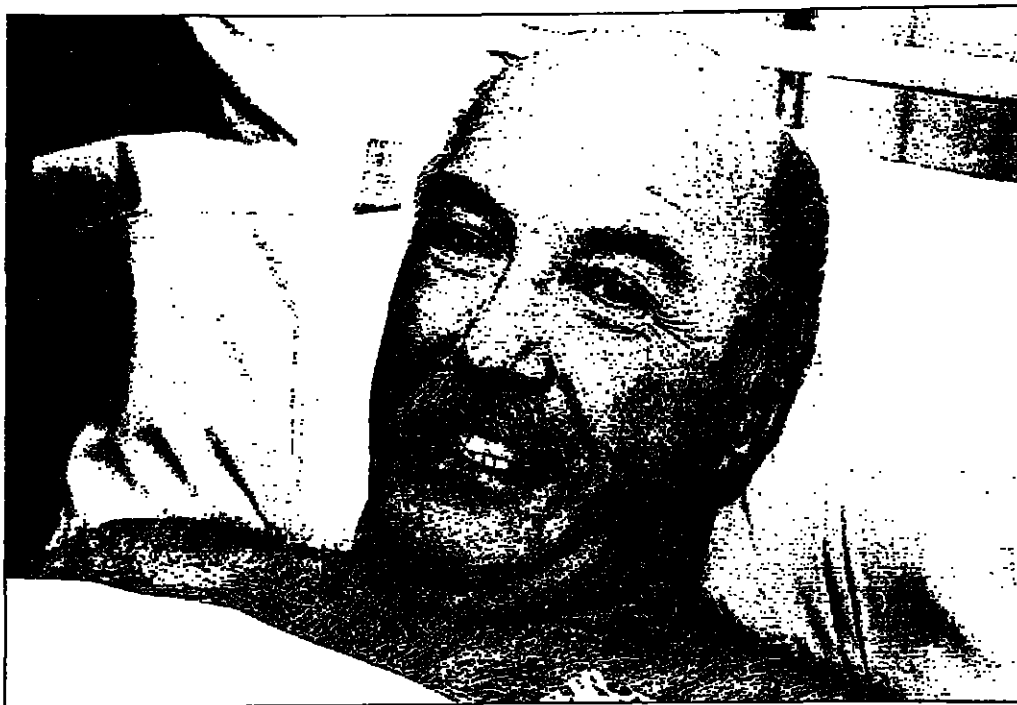
Professor Duncan MacLennan, of the Centre for Urban Studies at Glasgow University, blamed the physical deterioration of the estate on a lack of community spirit.

"One essentially has a group of people who are relatively isolated from each other, let alone the city, then there's the severe question about whether or not pouring in money will have any real effect," he said.

"In fact I'd say it would have no real effect in the long term and is just a waste of public money."

— Ian Burrell

PEOPLE



Bren Jones: 'I have had minor problems in the past but nothing like this'

Freefall skydiver tells of miracle escape

A British parachutist described yesterday how he survived after his chute became entangled with another skydiver 2,000ft above ground.

Bren Jones, 56, suffered only bruising when he landed in a soft ploughed field with his parachute and that of a fellow jumper flapping above him.

The incident happened on Sunday midway through a free-fall jump from 5,500ft above Hildesheim, near Scunthorpe, Humberside.

Speaking from his bed at Lincoln Hospital, Mr Jones, a businessman, said: "We flew to 5,000ft and jumped freefall and then I fell for about 3,000ft before opening my chute. Then I was blown into a fellow jumper and the canopies became entangled."

"My fellow jumper shouted he was going to disengage. He managed to free himself and opened his reserve chute and he landed OK."

"I was stuck with the two parachutes tangled up together. I couldn't get free or do anything. I was just falling. I don't know how fast I was going, just painfully fast. I didn't have time to think about anything. I

certainly didn't have time to think about if I was going to live or die. All I knew was that it was going to hurt."

"I blacked out before I hit the ground but landed on soft ploughed fields."

Trevor Dobson, chief instructor at Target Skyports, which operates from Hibaldstow Airfield, saw the incident through binoculars. He said Mr Jones's parachute had opened but not fully. However, the combined drag of the two unopened chutes slowed him down enough to save his life.

John Hitchen, safety officer for the British Parachute Association, said: "What apparently happened is that the two jumpers became entangled but they both kept their cool and at the last minute the other jumper managed to get free."

In spite of his scare, Mr Jones plans to jump again as soon as possible.

"I have had minor problems in the past but certainly nothing like this," he said. "It is my hobby and when I get better I will certainly do it again."

— Steve Boggan

'Full Monty' star keen to protect his privacy

The actor Robert Carlyle - star of the hit films *Trainspotting* and *The Full Monty* - yesterday warned the media to keep out of his private life.

Speaking at the launch of a new BBC Scotland drama serial, the actor said that he was happy with press coverage as long as it related to his work, but got angry when his private life was mentioned.

"I'm cool with it in terms of my work. It's when my private life starts to come out I get really angry. It's basically nobody's business but mine."

The outburst follows reports of his planned wedding to girlfriend Anastasia Shirley at exclusive Skibo Castle in Sutherland, owned by businessman Peter de Savary.

But weddings were far from the star's mind yesterday as he spoke

about his role as an "Edinburgh Goodfella" in *Looking After Jo Jo* - a controversial four-part drama which has been compared to *Trainspotting*.

The drama is set in a poor Edinburgh housing-estate in 1982 and tells the story of criminal activity and drug-dealing among a close-knit community.

But despite comparisons to *Trainspotting*, writer Frank Deasy described his drama as being about "drugs and war" whereas the film was about "drugs and the youth culture".

And Carlyle, who played hard-man Begbie in the award-winning film, said of his character: "If I thought it was going to be like Begbie all over again, I wouldn't have done it."

"*Trainspotting* was very stylistic.

I don't think there's anything trendy about *Jo Jo*."

The drama was filmed in Edinburgh and Glasgow during the summer of 1997 and Carlyle spent a lot of time with people living in the Sighthill and Wester Hailes areas of Edinburgh to research his role. "I know those people extremely well now and made a lot of friends. It was very easy for me to be accepted because of the Begbie role."

Carlyle, a Partick Thistle football supporter, was also asked about the plight of his favourite club who are in the midst of a financial crisis. "I love Thistle, they are a great wee club. Clubs the size of Celtic and Rangers should help out. The fact Paul Gascoigne's wages for a week could pay the staff there for a year is a disgrace."

UPDATE

PSYCHOLOGY

Taxi drivers head aggression league

New research suggests that taxi drivers are more aggressive drivers who are less likely to look out for hazards on the roads and cope in a more confrontational manner while put under stress while driving.

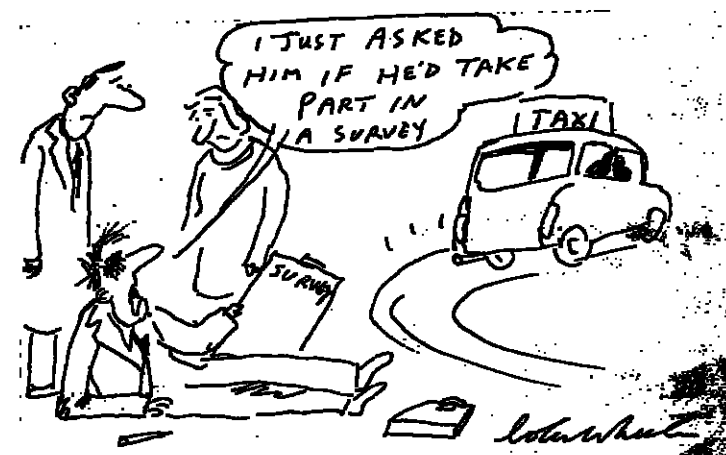
A study carried out by the University of Teesside looked at a variety of drivers and how they coped with the stresses of driving in a busy city.

They questioned police drivers, heavy goods vehicle drivers, copiers, occasional drivers as well as taxi drivers, and came to the conclusion that taxi drivers were the most distinctive in the aggression they displayed to other road users and the fact that they coped with stress in a confrontational way. They were also the most likely group to say they disliked driving.

The researchers, who are presenting their study at the British Psychological Society's winter conference today, looked at five groups of 20 drivers. Taxi drivers were much more likely than other groups to be thrill-seeking with HGV drivers being the second most likely group to look for thrills. HGV drivers were significantly more likely to look out for potential dangers on the roads than cabbies.

In comparison police drivers scored lowest on aggressive driving, were low on thrill seeking and were the best at monitoring potential hazards on the roads. Taxi drivers were also far more likely to cope with a stress on the roads. Taxi drivers were also far more likely to cope with a stress on the roads by becoming aggressive and confrontational, with HGV drivers and commuters the next most likely groups to use antagonistic means.

— Glenda Cooper, Social Affairs Correspondent



ENVIRONMENT

Christmas will claim 250,000 trees

Britain's Christmas will leave a body count of around a quarter of a million slain trees, the environment group Friends of the Earth claims today.

This year in the UK, the fifth-largest paper user in the world, an estimated 1.7 billion greetings cards will be sent, using 200,000 trees. Another 50,000 trees will go to wrap presents in 8,000 tons of paper. Friends of the Earth has criticised high-street stores for not stocking re-cycled products. "Major retailers deserve to be named and shamed for their lack of concern," Georgina Green of Friends of the Earth said. The public should also be doing more, she said. FoE recommends re-using gift wrap and sticking labels on cards for use next year.

HEALTH

Lottery 'leads to compulsive fear'

Playing the National Lottery becomes a fearful compulsion for people who use the same numbers every week, according to researchers.

People keep playing through fear that their numbers will come up when they have missed a go or changed their numbers, Pam Briggs and Sandra Wolfson, from the University of Northumbria, found in their recent study of lottery players. The psychologists state that "anticipatory regret" - imagining the potentially negative consequences of changing behaviour - provides more motivation than excitement at the prospect of a potential win in buying lottery tickets. Even for those who buy a ticket, pessimism is rife. The study found that many dream of winning in the future, but few think a win is likely in the foreseeable future.

TOURIST RATES

Australia (dollars)	2.42	Italy (lira)	2,789
Austria (schillings)	19.96	Japan (yen)	213.64
Belgium (francs)	58.68	Malta (lira)	0.62
Canada (\$)	2.28	Netherlands (guilders)	3.19
Cyprus (pounds)	0.83	Norway (kroner)	11.73
Denmark (kroner)	10.89	Portugal (escudos)	287.24
France (francs)	9.52	Spain (pesetas)	240.03
Germany (marks)	2.85	Sweden (kroner)	12.53
Greece (drachmai)	450.05	Switzerland (francs)	2.28
Hong Kong (\$)	12.38	Turkey (lira)	318.161
Ireland (punts)	1.08	USA (\$)	1.60

Source: Thomas Cook
Rates for indication purposes only

by Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

ZITS



7.30 FOR 8



by Chris Priestley

CONTENTS

Leading stories	3	Features	15
Health news	5	Leader, letters	16
In the courts	7	Comment	17
Politics	8,9	Obituaries	18
World news	10	Business	19-23
Rwanda's crisis	11	Sport	24-28
Despatches	12	Crossword	The Eye, 9
Health	13	Weather	The Eye, 10
Visual arts	14	TV & radio	The Eye, 11, 12

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Fourth tenor fills in for ill Pavarotti

Flu forced the opera singer Luciano Pavarotti (pictured right) to pull out of a long-awaited concert last night and another tomorrow.

Pavarotti, the man with the highest, and broadest, profile of the "Three Tenors", was to have been the tenor soloist in Verdi's *Requiem* at Symphony Hall, Birmingham, yesterday, and with the Philharmonia at the Royal Festival Hall, London, tomorrow. "He has been advised not to travel," a Philharmonia spokeswoman said.

But the concerts are going ahead with Roberto Alagna, the leading tenor of the next generation, filling in for Pavarotti, she said.

"He has been called the fourth tenor, and we are very grateful such a big name has been able to perform at such short notice," she said.

Alagna was flying in from Milan yesterday, back again for a performance at La Scala today and to Britain again for the Royal Festival Hall tomorrow, she said.

Pavarotti who, like his near contemporaries Jose Carreras and Placido Domingo, has been at the top of the operatic tree for more than 20 years, could not have more glamorous - or more symbolic - a stand-in than Alagna. With his partner, the soprano Angela Gheorghiu, the Franco-Sicilian has become a media darling in the last five years while making a sequence of award-winning recital discs and opera recordings, including Puccini's *La Rondine* and Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*.



ZITS



7.30 FOR 8



by Chris Priestley

Why death of Diana was good for our health

The death of Diana, Princess of Wales, led to a significant decrease in people seeking help for depression, according to psychiatric clinics. Admissions fell by up to 50 per cent in some cases. One explanation says Glenda Cooper, Social Affairs Correspondent, is that the public mourning helped people come to terms with private problems.

The outpouring of grief after the death of Diana, Princess of Wales allowed people to release deeply-buried emotions relating to personal problems they had chosen

not to deal with, psychiatric experts said yesterday.

A survey carried out by Speciality Care, a nationwide group of private clinics which also takes NHS referrals, reported a drop in admissions for a range of general psychiatric illnesses. In some cases there was a drop of 50 per cent.

Drops were most commonly seen in those suffering neurotic problems such as anxiety and stress, rather than the severely psychotic patients. Clinics in London, where there are more mental health patients, also reported a "lull" in referrals.

"The death of Diana acted as a catharsis," said Dianne Trueman, clinical manager of Sutton's Manor Clinic in Essex. "When they cried for Diana, many people - and particularly men who often have trouble

expressing emotions - found they could also cry for themselves allowing the release of all the repressed emotions that had built up in their life. The long-term effect of such behaviour can often lead to the development of mental health problems."

At one point in her clinic, which takes NHS referrals, she had filled only 12 out of 27 beds. "It is unprecedented," she said. Other factors also played a part the experts found: the windfall gains from building societies, the election and the late onset of winter all helped to create a "feelgood" factor.

"There's significant benefit from a good old cry and the death of Diana gave people the licence to do just that," said Haydn Lunn, manager of the Dove Clinic in the Midlands.

Dr Stephen Palmer, director of the Centre for Stress Management, said he too had noticed a "lull" in admissions, although it was impossible to say whether this had been caused by Diana's death. "When there are big events you find there is less depression. They act as a wonderful distraction ... there were so many people who were upset who would not be normally because they were grieving for themselves. It was therapeutic without the need for therapy. This trend could be very interesting."

And Cosmo Hallstrom, a member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' public education committee, said he also had seen a "dramatic reduction" in admissions at the Charter Clinic in Chelsea, although he also said that this could not be put down solely to Diana. "We are very sensitive to fluctuations in the NHS ... but personally I think it is more likely to affect people at the milder end of depression. I don't think it would have any effect on the serious cases of psychosis." He said that admissions were now beginning to rise again three months on from her death.

"Many found themselves overwhelmed both by her loss and by the feelings it revived from their past and present lives," said Professor Janet Sayers, who contributed to a special edition of *The Psychologist* which looked at reactions to Diana's death. "The nation's reaction ... has signalled even more strongly a change of heart - towards recognising our community with one another and the importance ... of being open to, voicing and sharing our feelings as she did with us."



Star trek: Julia Ormond in *Smilla's Feeling for Snow*, the film from a book in which a meteor hits Greenland; and a case of life imitating art following the events of last week

Still: 20th Century Fox

Search for Greenland's fallen meteor

A dense meteor crashed into the southern tip of Greenland last week. The hunt for it goes on, but it would take someone with Miss Smilla's feeling for snow to find it. This, however, is real life. *Charles Arthur*, Science Editor, investigates another narrow escape.

Two spotter planes were yesterday searching the southern tip of Greenland for the telltale signs of the huge meteorite impact that happened last week, but of which news has only just begun to trickle out.

The size of the meteorite, which lit up the dark morning sky on 9 December, could rival that of the Tunguska meteorite, a body 50 to 100 metres across, which exploded in the air over Siberia in June 1908. The energy released was equivalent to a 15-megatonne bomb, and flattened trees across hundreds of square kilometres. Such events happen only a couple of times a century.

Fishermen and early morning risers saw the sky brighten to daylight at 5.10am, as what eyewitnesses called a green streak flashed across the sky in a period estimated between 2 and 5 seconds. No one was able to photograph it - though in the town of Nuuk a car-park video surveillance camera aimed at the ground did record the incredible brightening of ambient light.

Seconds later, seismographic equipment recorded a 10-second shockwave. "It was seen all over the southern part of Greenland," Holger Pedersen, of Copenhagen University, told *The Independent* yesterday. "It wasn't like most meteor falls, which break up about 20 to 30km up and take a couple of minutes to reach the ground. This was travelling really fast and

stayed solid." But he said it was impossible at present to estimate the size of the Qaqortoq meteorite - named, by tradition, from the nearest post office. The early signs are that the meteorite was travelling at about Mach 10 - 7,600mph. Had it hit a major city the effect would have been disastrous.

On landing it would be incredibly hot, and melt its way through the icecap - which would then freeze over it, hiding it, though a cloud of water vapour could be let off.

If the description sounds familiar, that's because a buried meteorite in Greenland is one of the essential plot elements in Peter Hoeg's hugely popular book *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*, recently made into a film.

But this was not a publicity stunt, and the lessons from this event may be worrying. There are an estimated 100,000 objects bigger than a kilometre wide floating around the solar system close enough to pose a threat to Earth.

Mr Pepys goes to court against Grub Street

Monday, 15 December, London

8.30am. Am off to Royal Courts of Justice, for the opening of my case against that dreary rag, the London *Evening Standard*, which has been running a limp parody of my own sharp and beautifully-judged diary, under the byline of a low, backing fellow called Peter Bradshaw. My case hinges on convincing people that this nonsense, appearing under my photograph, could be misread as my own work. I wonder how the rest of the Press will report the case. Hope no other ghastly scribbles think it amusing to parody the parody. I cut a dashing figure in my Savile Row suit. Expecting a tedious day. I cheer myself up by taking the Jag to 97mph in The Strand, scattering a group of office workers on a zebra crossing. 10am: Arrive at the High Court, a rather "nouveau" building nothing like as grand as my own beloved Salwood Castle. Meet Geoffrey Hobbs, my estimable QC, and an assortment of solicitors including a fetching young woman with long, dark hair. On entering Court 60, I find the public gallery packed with onlookers, admirers and others who, judging by their slovenly appearance, are members of Her



Alan Clark's Secret Court Diary

...as imagined by the *Evening Standard's* Peter Bradshaw who is, in turn, parodied by our own Kathy Marks

Majesty's Press Corps. I also spy the wretched Bradshaw, a balding figure slumped on a bench at the back. I avoid acknowledging him, save for a slight curl of the lip. 10.30am: Hobbs, a sober fellow, begins outlining our case. He says that the *Standard* has failed to make clear that its column, cheekily headed Alan Clark's Secret Political Diary, is not penned by yours truly. It must be said that I would sooner cut off my right hand than stoop to writing such inferior trash. I want the diary withdrawn, and handsome damages. Hobbs recalls how the editor, Max Hastings, offered me my own column soon after I won the Kensington and Chelsea nomination. He explains to Mr Justice Lightman that I turned it

down because Hastings was offering a paltry £60,000 a year as recompense. 10.45am: I strike a gloriously languid pose of wounded dignity, eyes modestly cast down. Hobbs describes how, on meeting Max at the Chelsea Flower Show last summer, I asked him to pull the offending diary but he refused to play ball. I used to think Max was one of us, but now I'm not so sure. As Hobbs drones on about legal precedents, I dart a glance across at the court usher, a well-preserved redhead with a fine figure beneath her black robe. 11.40am: A succession of witnesses take the stand to declare their conviction that I, and not Bradshaw, was the author of the column. Several work for Denton Hall, my own firm of solicitors, while others are old pals, such as Bob Worcester of Mori. The *Standard's* QC, Peter Prescott, fancies himself as a bit of a wit. He paces around theatrically while asking questions, and affects a tone of languorous scepticism. 12.59am: Adjourn to a nearby hostelry for a thoroughly enjoyable lunch. 2pm: Charles Walker, agent for my TV and film rights, describes my Diaries as "Pepysian". Paperback copies of my notorious oeuvre are then passed around. Excellent; further sales are guaranteed. Prescott reads out the passage about the woman with the "bouncing globes" with whom I once had the good fortune to share a compartment on a train. Ah, fond memories! 3pm: Reference is made to Clive James, a vulgar Antipodean broadcaster who wrote to Bradshaw expressing his admiration for the spoof column. My gaze drifts to the public gallery, where I catch sight of an exquisite creature with rosebud lips and bedroom eyes. Was it my imagination, or did the faintest thrill of electricity pass between us? 4.30pm: Court adjourns. Look forward to crossing swords with Prescott tomorrow.

ARMANI



ARMANI

eau pour homme

GIORGIO ARMANI

[illegible]

ving miserat



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Students in the US are turning to drugs

South Wales child abuse inquiry spreads to 33 homes

Detectives in South Wales are investigating allegations of child abuse at 33 children's homes. Roger Dobson reports on one of Britain's biggest child abuse inquiries, triggered by the suicide of a care worker nine years ago.

Operation Goldfinch, launched yesterday in South Wales, takes the number of children's homes

in Wales where allegations of abuse have been made or where there have been police investigations to 96.

Detectives in South Wales are now investigating claims of sexual and physical abuse at 33 children's homes, where more than 250 individual allegations by former residents make the inquiry one of Britain's biggest into child abuse. With the latest inquiry, homes in Cardiff, Swansea, Bridgend, Neath, Port Talbot, and the South Wales Valleys, have joined those in Cwylod and

Gwynedd where the North Wales Abuse Tribunal has been investigating over 500 complaints.

"The allegations range from minor physical abuse to the most serious sexual assault," a police spokesman said yesterday.

Allegations of abuse at homes in areas outside South Wales have also been made to detectives in Cardiff and have been passed to other forces for investigation.

A squad of 42 detectives has been set up by South Wales Police and Chief Constable Tony Burden said yesterday that

whatever resources were needed would be made available for an inquiry whose scale is likely to rival that of investigations in Cheshire, North Wales and Merseyside.

The events which led up to the launch of Operation Goldfinch yesterday have their roots in the suicide of a care worker, Alan O'Brien, nine years ago. Following his death, two large suitcases containing paedophile material were found in a left luggage locker at Cardiff railway station. It is not known

who put them there, but O'Brien was being investigated over an allegation of abuse on Merseyside.

Around the time of his death, he was working at the Taff Vale Children's Home in Cardiff. No wider action was taken at the time, but last year an inquiry was launched at the home following the jailing of another care worker for abuse.

Following claims that the discovery of the suitcases in 1989 should have been acted upon at the time, West Midlands Police carried out an independent in-

vestigation. The Crown Prosecution Service has decided that there is sufficient evidence to prosecute a former director of social services in South Glamorgan, and the former head of Taff Vale, for the alleged offence of misconduct in public office.

In September last year, Cardiff social services formally asked the police to investigate allegations of abuse at Taff Vale. South Wales police began the investigation using a helpline to allow former residents to contact them. It is a result of what

police were told by former residents five other homes that were being looked at, and yesterday a second inquiry looking at 27 other homes was launched.

It is the seventeenth and latest of a series of major police investigations in abuse at children's homes in Britain. As with many of the other inquiries, most of the claims relate to the Seventies and Eighties.

One man who has given evidence to the North Wales Tribunal told *The Independent*, "For years they made me think I was

to blame for what happened... it was only when my son was born two years ago that I knew I had to do something. I looked at him and decided that I would do everything I could to make sure the men who abused me never abused any other child."

A helpline has been set up by the police on 01656 865404 for complainants and witnesses to contact.

● Two other former Taff Vale staff have been charged with offences, and a third man, aged 50, was arrested yesterday.

Robbers attack airline magnate

A multi-millionaire airline tycoon has been beaten and robbed at his home. Alexandra Williams points out that the raid is only the latest in a series of violent assaults and robberies on wealthy London residents.

Tony Ryan, the owner of the low-cost, no frills airline Ryanair, has been attacked by robbers who forced their way into his west London home, punching him to the ground and stealing cash and jewels.

Mr Ryan, who has an estimated personal fortune of £150m, was ambushed as he and a female companion left his home. Two men forced the couple back inside the house in Cadogan Square, Chelsea, and insisted that Mr Ryan reveal the safe combination number.

When he refused, the multi-millionaire was beaten to the ground. The men grabbed £400 in cash and jewellery and escaped in a car. Detectives have not ruled out the possibility that the raid is linked to a string of violent assaults on wealthy Lon-

don residents. Gangs have targeted people leaving shops such as Harrods and Harvey Nichols in expensive cars and followed them home. The victims have been attacked as they got out of their vehicles or as they were about to enter their homes.

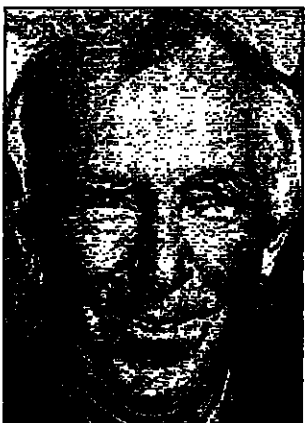
Police believe this was the method used by the gang who held Michael Green, the chairman of Carlton Communications, and his wife Tessa, at knife point at their Mayfair home in April. And, in February, Lady Weidenfeld, wife of the publishing millionaire Lord Weidenfeld, was robbed of nearly £110,000 in jewellery on the doorstep of her Chelsea home.

The Formula One chief Bernie Ecclestone was attacked in July last year as he tried to shield his wife Slavica, who had a £650,000 diamond ring snatched from her finger outside their home. A month later, the wife of Christopher Moran, a multi-millionaire City financier, fought with a gang of five muggers who ambushed the family in the underground car park of their Chelsea home. Helen Moran was pinned to the ground as the gang wrenched off her £15,000 Rolex watch and grabbed her handbag.

Recent assaults have also included the mugging of a Saudi Arabian diplomat, whose £95,000 Mercedes was stolen, and an attack on the Earl of Dudley and his wife at their Kensington mansion.

Detective Constable Gareth John, heading the inquiry into Saturday's robbery, said: "It's too early to say whether this attack is connected to previous ones but we can't rule out the possibility."

Mr Ryan suffered minor injuries. Police said the two men they are hunting in connection with the attack are both black, in their twenties and 6ft tall.



Tony Ryan: Refused to reveal safe combination



Landmark: A demonstrator climbing between poplar trees in a park in Kingston, south-west London. The trees, which will obscure river views from a development of luxury apartments, are threatened with felling; Kingston Council votes on their fate tonight Photograph: Phillip Hollis

Congested skies will mean more flight delays

Those travelling by air next summer are likely to face lengthy flight delays as Britain's skies become ever more congested.

With air passenger numbers set to grow by 6 per cent a year until 2000, and no sign of new equipment to deal with the extra flights, more holidaymakers are likely to spend time loitering at the boarding gate.

"Assuming traffic growth remains high, a rise in the level of delays is possible next year," said

Keith Williams, director of safety and operations at National Air Traffic Services (Nats). Mr Williams added: "Delays due to air traffic control will probably not lengthen next year... but more aircraft could be delayed."

About 9 per cent of UK flights were delayed by air traffic capacity limitations in summer 1997. The flights held up were, on average, delayed for 15 minutes.

The matter is made worse as the new centre at Swanwick, de-

signed to relieve the pressure on controllers and planned to start operations in 1996, will not now open until the end of 1999.

Instead, the forecast 20 per cent increase in UK commercial aircraft movements will have to be handled by juggling the resources of the current system. MPs have questioned why a contract to build the new £300m Scottish air traffic control centre has been handed to a consortium headed by the same company - Lockheed Martin -

which has failed to deliver the Swanwick operation.

Mr Williams said a record number of aircraft had been handled by UK controllers this year. He added the London centre at West Drayton handled 1.5 million take-offs and landings last year.

"Delays are creeping up but we should stress that of all the reasons that flights are delayed in Europe, only 19 per cent are for air traffic control reasons." Compounded by problems

caused by both the airlines and passengers, some delays can be lengthy. Last summer, British Airways flights from Gatwick to Athens suffered average delays of 49 minutes. Meanwhile at Heathrow, trips on Virgin Atlantic to New York left on average more than 40 minutes late.

● Nats announced yesterday that despite the rise in air traffic, the number of near-miss incidents had not increased in the past year.

Police abuse sickness leave

Almost 400,000 working days are lost every year through officers in the Metropolitan Police taking time off sick. Jason Bennett, Crime Correspondent, says that a report published today suggests the system is being abused and wasting millions of pounds.

About 1,500 police officers are absent from work in London every day due to illness or injury, and the number continues to rise.

A report by the National Audit Office, the public spending watchdog, says that only 13 per cent of the absences are due to injuries sustained on duty, while there has been a big rise in days lost to stress and depression.

It notes that while outright abuse of sick leave is difficult to prove, long-term absence relies on certificates from doctors which are "often on the basis of only a brief consultation and who may be reluctant to offend a patient". It adds that sanctions against abusers are "limited" and that £6.3m could be saved if the average sickness rate was reduced by one day a year.

The study comes at a time when there is growing concern about the number of police officers retiring on medical grounds - including some who are leaving to avoid allegations of corruption and malpractice - which now costs £330m a year. In some forces, three-quarters of officers use ill health to retire early on a full pension, although this issue is not addressed in today's report.

The NAO says that the rate of sick leave among the 27,000 Metropolitan Police officers is higher than the national average and the highest of all metropolitan forces. While praising the Metropolitan Police for making improvements in dealing with sick leave, it expresses concern that new powers to reduce or stop the pay of officers on extended sick leave is rarely used.

In March this year, 312 officers - 1 per cent of the force - had been absent for six months or more within the past year, yet only 10 of these had their pay reduced. Just 12 per cent of all cases were due to an injury sustained while on duty. Sir Paul Condon, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, has agreed to review this policy.

On average, police officers took 14.4 working days off sick in the year to April 1997 compared with 11.3 in 1991/92. This costs the police at least £72m a year.

The Metropolitan Police said that the force accepted the report's recommendations and added that it had already started implementing some of them.

● *The Management of Sickness Absence in the Metropolitan Police Service*, is available on 0171-873 0011. Priced £9.85.

Hindley officer disciplined

A police officer who helped the dying mother of moors' murder victim Lesley Ann Downey when she attended Myra Hindley's High Court appeal has been disciplined for his actions. Wheelchair user Ann West, 68, who has liver cancer and has just weeks to live, telephoned Detective Constable Norman Brennan, director of the Victims of Crime Trust, to ask for his help in arranging transport and accommodation for the hearing in London earlier this month.

Hindley was appealing against the Home Secretary's decision that she must spend the rest of her life in jail. DC Brennan, 38, who has become a family friend of the Wests, took time off from his duties to collect Mrs West and her husband Alan in a CID car and take her to the court. Press photographers snapped him helping Mrs West into court and he was subsequently disciplined for his conduct. Last Thursday he was transferred to uniformed duties and reprimanded for taking a police car without consent, being absent from duty and making a false entry in his diary.

IRA trial jury sent to hotel

An Old Bailey jury trying four men accused of plotting an IRA lorry-bomb attack on London was yesterday sent to a hotel for a fifth night after again failing to reach verdicts.

It returns today to continue deliberations. Patrick Kelly, 31, Brian McHugh, 31, James Murphy, 26 and Michael Phillips, 22, have denied conspiring to cause explosions between 1 January and 24 September last year and possessing explosives. The IRA planned the campaign in London but was foiled by police, who shot dead a vital member of the team and arrested others. The prosecution has alleged. The dead man, Diarmuid O'Neill, 27, was allegedly "at the heart of the conspiracy" and belonged to a Provisional IRA unit which was preparing the attack. The gang had access to many tons of explosives and was using a secure storage unit in north London as a bomb factory, the court heard.

Rail firm fails to halt strike

A rail company yesterday failed in a legal bid to halt a strike by some of its workers which threatens "considerable disruption" to services. Wales & West mounted a legal challenge in the High Court, claiming that a ballot by the Rail, Maritime and Transport union was defective.

But the court refused to give the company an injunction, leaving this Friday's strike, in a dispute over hours, still on. The union has also called a 24-hour walkout at South West Trains over a similar row about the working week.

David Weir, Managing Director of Wales & West, said he was disappointed with the court's decision, adding that the company will do all it can to minimise disruption on Friday.

Power shower meter call

The days of the super-powerful power shower could be numbered. Government advisers have suggested that homes which have these extra-strong devices fitted should have water meters installed as well and water companies agree.

Sales of power showers with built in electric pumps have soared recently. Taking a shower is generally reckoned to save water compared to having a bath, but that is not so with the stronger power showers.

The Water Regulations Ad-

visory Committee says those which use over 20 litres a minute should require written approval from the household's water company before installation. That would give the company the option of insisting on fitting a water meter, as happens with swimming pools in most of the country.

In less than four minutes, such a shower can consume enough to fill a bath. They flow three times as fast as a non-powered, gravity-fed shower.

The advisers have also sug-

gested cutting the maximum allowed flush volume of lavatory cisterns from 7.5 litres to six for all new WCs. But their suggestion that a European-type flushing mechanism should be allowed as well as the British, siphon-based one has angered the Water Companies Association and UK manufacturers, in the shape of the British Bathroom Council.

They claim the siphon-system is virtually leak proof, while Euro-style valves often dribble.

— Nicholas Schoon

Women win record equality payout

The Irish Republic's Labour Court has ordered four female aviation communications officers each to be paid nearly £100,000 (£93,000) backpay in the biggest single award in the history of the country's 10-year-old Equal Pay Act.

The government-appointed

court made the record ruling after declaring that the women were doing the same job as their male employees, but being paid almost £100,000 a year less. The order that the applicants were entitled to equal pay was backdated to 1989.

The four women are based

at the Irish Aviation Authority station near Shannon Airport, Co. Clare, where they provide communication and weather services information to transatlantic flights.

They were sponsored in their action by Ireland's Civil and Public Service Union, which claimed there was "deep-rooted sex discrimination" at their workplace.

Monica Lyons, one of the four, said: "It has been a long fight... and very tough."

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DAILY POEM

Not a Love Poem

By Jane Holland

Sing me a love-song that has nothing to do with love.
Write me a line that cuts straight to the bone.

Show me a heart bent back like a blade,
white as a knuckle in the heat and the hate of despair.

Throw me your silence like the slow arc of a curve-ball.
Avoid my eyes, they are terrible as truth.

As a snooker player, Jane Holland ranked 24th in the world before she was banned for "bringing the game into disrepute". Her first collection of poems, *The Brief History of a Disreputable Woman*, is published by Bloodaxe (£6.95).

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9/POLITICS

Schools and hospitals could cash in on benefit cuts

Cuts in Britain's benefit bill will be diverted into hospitals and schools, the minister in charge of reforming the system said last night. Frank Field's keynote speech pointed to radical changes in a delayed Green Paper on the benefit system, writes Fran Abrams.

Ministers yesterday again refused to say whether they were considering compelling lone mothers to take jobs under the Welfare to Work scheme.

Harriet Harman, the Secretary of State for Social Security, faced new criticism from Labour backbenchers in the Commons just hours before her colleague Frank Field set out the principles for the reforms.

Asked whether single mothers would be forced into jobs, she replied: "Compulsion is not the issue." She also failed to rule out means testing or taxing disability benefits, but did say that "no one is even talking about taking away benefits off those who need them - disabled or pensioners. Of course we mustn't do that". The Government would honour its pledge to maintain the old-age pension, she said.

However, Mr Field, minister for welfare reform, suggested that money could be diverted from benefits into health and education. In a lecture organised by *Prospect* magazine, he added that the benefits bill - currently £100bn per year and rising fast - could be cut if more people went out to work.

He also said that the current system was "leaking billions of pounds to the wrong people every year" through fraud, and

that this could not go on. "If savings are made from the social security budget - and by moving people into work we will reduce the financial load - we will be releasing resources for education and health," he said.

But while the aim was to divert resources to other areas, Britain should not aim for a "bargain-basement system" like the one in the United States, where welfare had become a dirty word because it was seen as only being for the poor.

He also suggested that more benefits could be delivered through public-private partnerships or even by voluntary organisations. Friendly societies, trades unions and charities could administer benefits, bringing them closer to those who received them, he said.

He repeated that there would be "hard choices" to be made and added: "I am under no illusions that this is a long game, or that we need all the help we can get."

A spokesman for the Department of Social Security confirmed last night that Mr Field's lecture on the principles that should govern welfare reform gave pointers to a forthcoming Green Paper on the subject. It had been due by the end of the year, but is now expected some time in January or February.

There was also confirmation last night that social security ministers and environment ministers were working on a scheme that could dramatically reduce the amount spent each year on housing benefits. Ms Harman told Dale Campbell-Savours, Labour MP for Worthington and a strong advocate of reforms to pin levels of rent paid to landlords, housing associations and local authorities, that housing benefits were "very much part of the comprehensive spending review".



Harriet Harman: Pressed again in the Commons on whether single mothers would be forced to work under benefits reform, she replied: "Compulsion is not the issue"
Photograph: Brian Harris



Frank Field: Billions of pounds 'leaking to the wrong people every year' through fraud must be stopped

Totting up bill for illness and disability

How many people get it? 4.3 million get the general sickness and disability benefits. On top of that some people can claim disability premium on top of income support.

How much does it cost? The disability bill has trebled since the early 1980s from £4.1bn (£7bn in today's prices) to £23.5bn. It is now one-quarter of the Social Security Budget.

What types of benefit are there? The main benefits are Incapacity benefits (a means tested benefit for short-/long-term people who are unable to work), Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Severe Disablement Allowance, Invalid Care Allowance, industrial injuries allowance, war pensions.

Who gets what? 1.9 million get Disability Living Allowance, which is split into two components: mobility (£13.50-£34.60 per week) and care (£13.50-£49.50).

How about paying for care? Attendance Allowance is a tax-free benefit for help with care ranging from £52.40 to £48.50.

What if I'm disabled through work? You are eligible for Industrial Injuries Benefit, claimed by a quarter of a million people.

Who pays? The Government, if there is no blame attached to the company for your disablement.

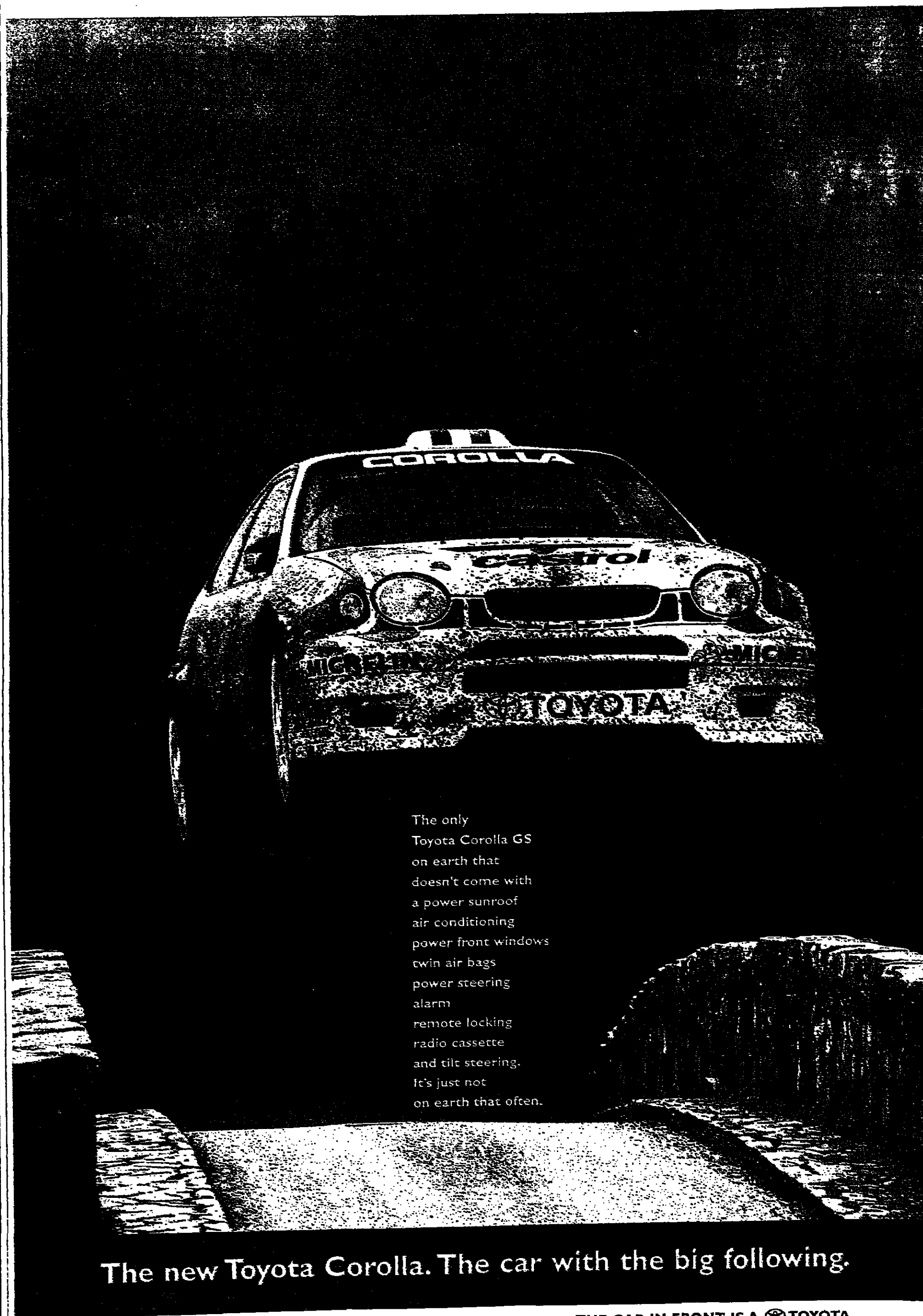
What if I can't work? You may be eligible for Incapacity Benefit - 2.4 million get it. Short-term is £47.10 a week, long-term £55.70. To get this benefit people have to take the All Work Test - which involves a doctor assessing your ability to work, looking at your ability to walk, sit, lift and stand in addition to any injuries or ailments you may have. The scoring system means anyone with 15 points or more on a 0-30 scale remains in benefit.

What if I haven't paid enough National Insurance to qualify for incapacity benefit? You get Severe Disablement Allowance, which is tax free. Again you have to take the All Work Test.

What if I am working? 12,500 get Disability Working Allowance - those working for low wages or short hours get £49.55 single £77.55 for a couple.

Why has the bill gone up so much? A combination of factors:

1. A push in the early 1990s to alert people that they could claim such benefits.
2. An ageing population needs more care.
3. There were suggestions that some people may have been shunted on to incapacity benefit rather than stay on the unemployment count, and that some GPs were sympathetic to putting people on benefit. Incapacity Benefit, with its All Work Test, was introduced in April 1995 to try to stop this.



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French officers accused of extreme pro-Serb bias

France said yesterday that it was shocked to be accused of harbouring war criminals in Bosnia. But John Lichfield in Paris says the newspaper 'Le Monde' has reported extreme pro-Serb sentiments among French officers in the country.

troops. She protested that France alone was refusing to allow its military officers to testify before the Bosnian, and Rwandan, war crimes tribunals.

After the meeting yesterday afternoon, the ministry spokeswoman said Mr Védrine had told Ms Arbour that he was "deeply shocked" by these "scandalous allegations". He said France would co-operate with the international tribunals "in its own

way". But it would refuse to allow the tribunals to be turned into a media circus in which witnesses became indistinguishable from the accused.

Ms Arbour, by all accounts, stood her ground. She told Mr Védrine that France was failing in its duty to co-operate with the formal international inquiries which it had itself helped to create.

In the meantime, further fuel was

pooured on the controversy by the influential newspaper *Le Monde* (the first to carry Ms Arbour's allegations). The newspaper's correspondent in Sarajevo reported widespread pro-Serb sentiment among senior French officers serving in Bosnia.

Christian Lecomte quoted one colonel at the French headquarters as saying that the Serbs had been "sacrificed" by the Dayton

accord of November 1995 which ended the Bosnian civil war. The re-arming of the Muslims by the United States would lead to an "Islamic resurgence in the region", he said, which would "destabilise Europe".

To justify his remarks, the officer claimed that Serbian schoolgirls in Sarajevo were being forced to wear Islamic headscarves. This, *Le Monde* said, was a total-

ly false allegation, peddled by extremist Serbs.

In interviews with the French press, Ms Arbour claimed that most of the indicted Serb war criminals sought by the Hague tribunal - and all the most important ones - were living in impunity in the French sector of Bosnia.

The French defence ministry retorted yesterday that there were only "six to eight" wanted people in the French zone, compared to 10 in the US sector and "nearly 25 in the British sector". *Le Monde* complained that these figures were out of date; there had been a movement of indicted Serbs into the French zone since the arrest of one Serb and the killing of another by British troops in the north-western town of Prijedor last July.

The newspaper said that indicted Serbs were "parading" through Foca, in eastern Bosnia, one of the principal towns in the French zone. They included Dragan Gogovic and Janko Jajic, two of the Bosnian Serb officials accused of organising the systematic rape of Muslim women in 1992.

"Scandalous", "unspeakable", "profoundly shocking". The French foreign ministry is expert at hinting its displeasure but all diplomatic language went out of the window yesterday.

The foreign minister, Hubert Védrine, furiously protested in person to Louise Arbour, the chief prosecutor of the international war crimes tribunals in The Hague. It was Ms Arbour, a French-Canadian judge, who accused France at the weekend of, in effect, providing a safe haven for indicted Serb war criminals in the south-east part of Bosnia which is patrolled by French

CLINTON TO VISIT TROOPS AT CHRISTMAS AS BATTLE WITH CONGRESS LOOMS

President Bill Clinton is to make a flying pre-Christmas visit to United States troops serving with the Nato-led contingent in Bosnia. The visit, likely to take place next weekend and take in Tuzla and Sarajevo, is seen not just as a seasonal morale-booster for the troops, but as a sign of the administration's continuing commitment to maintaining a US military presence in former Yugoslavia.

The congressional mandate for the troops to remain in Bosnia expires at the

end of June and Congress, with a Republican majority in both houses, a distinctly isolationist tinge and elections due next year, is expected to contest any proposal that the troops should stay longer.

Administration officials say that Mr Clinton's visit will be his opening gambit in the campaign to keep US troops in place. They say he will use his trip to warn that progress made since the Dayton accords were signed two years ago is insufficient to warrant the withdrawal of US troops by the

June deadline. While Britain and other European have largely accepted the argument for remaining, they also recognise that it is unrealistic for them to stay without the Americans. The US provides satellite reconnaissance, transport helicopters and other equipment that Europe lacks but are considered essential to the operations of the Nato-led Stabilisation Force (S-For).

While Mr Clinton has publicly acknowledged that US troops will probably have to stay in Bosnia beyond the June

deadline, divisions have emerged between members of his administration. The Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, seems more inclined to argue for a continued US role in Bosnia than the Defense Secretary, William Cohen - although one interpretation is that Mr Cohen is simply holding out for more money and better terms for the cash-strapped military than objecting in principle to the extension of involvement.

— Mary Dejevsky, Washington

Guyana breaks tradition

Voters in Guyana went to the polls yesterday, with a white woman born in the United States tipped to emerge as the country's president.

In South America's only English-speaking nation, politics has little to do with ideology and a lot to do with ethnic origins. The country is split between immigrants from the Indian sub-continent and those of African origin, descendants of those brought over in British colonial days. Strange, then, that the winner of the presidential ballot is likely to be an elderly Jewish woman from Chicago.

Janet Jagan, 76, an avowed but mellowed Marxist, seems set for the presidential palace as candidate of the ruling People's Progressive Party (PPP). In fact, she has not been out of the palace for long because she is the widow of Cheddi Jagan, the PPP's long-time leader who died in office in March this year.

Mrs Jagan has been a citizen of Guyana until it became independent in 1966, for three decades. She met her husband in the US during the Second World War when he was a dental student. That makes her something of an honorary member of the Indian community, which the PPP, founded by Mr Jagan, traditionally represents.

Polls suggest that she will defeat Desmond Hoyte, 68, the candidate of the opposition People's National Congress (PNC), whose powerbase is the community of African descent.

Mrs Jagan appears to have been put forward to unite the PPP under her husband's name, and it is believed that after winning the election she could hand over to a younger successor, widely tipped to be Barrath Jagdeo, now finance minister.

— Phil Davison



A Thai woman throws holy water onto skulls and bones to be burned in the world's largest mass cremation at a temple in Samut Sakorn province. Tons of bones and 21,347 skulls are to be cremated this week to mark the end of urban burials in Bangkok. The unclaimed remains were taken from a Chinese cemetery

Photograph: Reuters

Castro gets into the festive spirit

President Fidel Castro is offering to declare Christmas an official holiday this year and share Cuba's limited resources to ensure the success of the Pope's visit to the Communist country.

During a three-hour speech broadcast on Sunday night on national television, Mr Castro was unusually warm in his com-

munications about the Church and the Pope, calling John Paul's visit here from 21 to 25 January an "honour for Cuba, and a valiant gesture".

... was the strongest sign of Mr Castro's resolve to ensure a trouble-free visit - the first by a pope to the island.

AP — Havana

Airliner crashes in Sharjah

An airliner with 86 people on board crashed yesterday near an airport in the United Arab Emirates. There was no word on survivors. The Tu-154 was en route from Tajikistan to Sharjah, UAE. Emergency teams were en route to the crash site.

The plane was carrying 77 passengers and nine crew. Local reports say the plane went down in a desert outside the airport of Sharjah, one of the seven emirates.

— AP, Dubai

Carlos lawyers pull out

Three lawyers representing Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, known as Carlos the Jackal, withdrew from his trial in Paris yesterday. The manoeuvre seemed to be part of a strategy to reduce the trial to a farce. The presiding judge ordered the principle defence lawyer, Isabelle Coutant-Peyre, to continue in the case and made a formal complaint to the Paris bar when she refused. The president of the bar also ordered her to resume her duties but she again declined. Ms Coutant-Peyre said she was withdrawing because the court had delayed judgement on her complaint that key witnesses were being withheld from the trial. The hearing continued without the three lawyers.

Ramirez Sanchez is accused of the murder of two French secret service agents and a Lebanese informer in Paris in June 1975.

— John Lichfield, Paris

Tsar's bones can be moved

Russia's Supreme Court yesterday overturned a ban by a regional court on transferring to Moscow the remains of the country's last tsar and his family, who were murdered by Bolsheviks in 1918. The decision opens the way for a final round of tests to establish the bones' authenticity. Last month the Sverdlovsk regional court blocked the transfer of the bones from the Ural city of Yekaterinburg. Shortly afterwards the court allowed some of the bones to be transferred to the capital for tests.

— Reuters, Moscow

Disabled girls sterilised

A report released yesterday by the government's human rights agency said more than 1,000 girls with learning difficulties had been illegally sterilised in the last five years. In 1992, a High Court decision made sterilisation illegal if it was not medically required, unless permission was granted by a court or tribunal. The report, commissioned by the federal Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, showed permission had been granted 17 times since 1992 for women to be sterilised. However, the commission said figures showed at least 1,045 girls have been sterilised over that period.

— AP, Sydney

Party split on Australia's right

Australia's One Nation party, led by Pauline Hanson who triggered a row about race, is in turmoil after the launch of a breakaway party, a former Hanson supporter said yesterday.

Concerns about the party's direction and ultra-right wing policies prompted the formation of the new Australian One Nation Party, which was launched in New South Wales last Sunday.

Peter Archer, one of the rebel party's founding members, said that Ms Hanson faced a "very bleak" future. "I think One Nation will eventually fizzle," he told Australian Broadcasting Corporation radio yesterday. "... the breakaway [party] may have accelerated that process but ... I think the current Pauline Hanson's One Nation would have been in total

turmoil before the next election."

Mr Archer, who has been accused in parliament of having links with the right-wing League of Rights group, said former supporters of Ms Hanson had become concerned about the power of the party's core leaders. "It's very dictatorial ... If you do express any concerns or have any ideas, you're either fobbed off or smeared, or kicked out of the party, or both," he said.

Ms Hanson, elected to parliament 21 months ago, shot to prominence last year when she warned that Australia was in danger of being swamped by Asians and criticised Aboriginal welfare. But her party's popularity has steadily to about 3 per cent from more than 10 per cent after its launch last April.

— Reuters, Canberra

Lau in passport battle

Emily Lau, one of Hong Kong's most outspoken politicians, is being forced to give up her British passport so that she can contest next May's legislative council elections. She had been planning to challenge the legality of the ban on foreign passport holders standing for seats in the geographic constituencies, but said yesterday that time was running out for such a challenge.

Under Hong Kong's new election laws, foreign passport holders will be allowed to stand in certain so-called functional constituencies, where seats are filled by voters from occupational groups. Mrs Lau described this as "very arbitrary and very unfair".

Many middle-class people in Hong Kong hold foreign passports, including a high percentage of those who sat in the last elected legislature which was dissolved when China resumed sovereignty over Hong Kong in July. Under new rules, a maximum of 20 per cent of members will be allowed to hold foreign passports.

Mrs Lau, a former journalist, has lived in Britain where she worked for the BBC. When she returned to Hong Kong, she quickly established a reputation as one of the most daunting interrogators of government officials. She was one of the few reporters to have taken Margaret Thatcher, the former prime minister, by surprise after the signing of the 1984 agreement for Hong Kong's reversal to Chinese rule. At a memorable press conference, she asked Mrs Thatcher how she felt about delivering Hong Kong's people into the hands of Communist rule. The question received a blustery response.

Mrs Lau is a founder member of the Frontier Party. She received a record number of votes in the last elections for the legislature, and was one of the council's most popular and aggressive members.

Although the supporters of the new regime tend to label all its opponents as being "pro-British", they have found it hard to pin this label on Emily Lau who, despite her British citizenship, was a harsh critic of the outgoing regime.

— Stephen Vines
Hong Kong

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Militias raid camps as new offensive starts in the killing fields

The latest massacre in Rwanda has further dashed hopes for peace after the 1994 genocide. Amelia French in Kigali reports on how remnants of the militias which carried out the genocide are stepping up their campaign of violence.

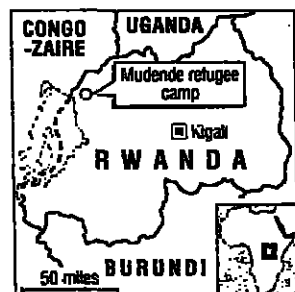
Everyone thought it was likely to happen again and it did. Last week, suspected Rwandan Hutu militiamen attacked a UN camp for Tutsi refugees from Congo-Zaire and massacred many of the inhabitants.

It was the second attack in only four months on the camp at Mudende, situated in one of the most violent areas of north-western Rwanda. In August, more than 130 refugees were killed.

This time, the official death-toll was about 270, though survivors say the true figure was much higher.

The Rwandan army, which counted the bodies along with UN officials, denies this. But the hideous results were there for all to see: charred bodies, babies hacked to death, blood-soaked clothes strewn around, and burnt-out tents.

The regional military chief, Col Kayumba Nyamwasa, said he had suspended the army commander guarding the camp for failing to respond when attackers set about the



camp with guns, grenades and machetes at around midnight.

Up to 200 tents were burned. "I looked out of my window and saw flames going right up into the sky," one resident said.

Rwandan officials and the UN are trying to work out what is to be done with more than 16,000 survivors of the carnage, most of whom have fled to a nearby temporary camp.

This was the latest attack in an escalating campaign of violence in north-west Rwanda by Hutu militiamen, apparently still committed to the agenda of Tutsi extermination that the world witnessed three years ago.

The Rwandan authorities say the militiamen are the remnants of the former government army and their militia allies, who carried out the genocide of 1994, in which an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and Hutu opponents of the regime were killed.

They say most of the militiamen returned to Rwanda during the final repatriation of refugees who fled to Zaire and elsewhere in 1994, when the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front took power. Certainly, the violence has increased dramatically following the last mass repatriation of Hutu refugees over the past year.

"We are not fighting a war, we are fighting genocide," Col Kayumba said the day after the attack, as he stood beside the

bodies of women and children laid out for burial at the camp at Mudende.

The Rwandan government has been accused of dragging its feet over the repatriation of Tutsi refugees to Congo-Zaire. It has been suggested that if they were sent back over the border, the Tutsi minority in the north-west of Rwanda would feel even more vulnerable.

The ethnic divide in the north-west between the Hutus and Tutsis is becoming increasingly bitter. The methods which are used by the militiamen include attacking and killing Tutsi civilians, storming jails to release genocide suspects, killing officials, both Tutsi and Hutus believed to be co-operating with the army, burning local administration buildings and ambushing passenger and military vehicles.

The army says that after each attack, the militiamen melt back into the local population, which clearly supports them. Often, the local Hutu population flees immediately after an attack, fearing retribution at the hands of the army. Reports from the north-west speak of large numbers of Hutu civilians being killed in the army's counter-insurgency operations. Tutsi civilians are also reported to be carrying out reprisal killings of Hutus from time to time.

The army mostly denies all this and says such reports are put out by supporters of the militiamen. Given the security situation in the region, diplomats, human-rights monitors, members of international organisations and journalists have been advised to travel only with military escorts. This makes independent information hard to come by.

The Rwandan authorities are increasingly maintaining that there is no such thing as innocent bystanders amongst the Hutus of the north-west, which is traditionally the heartland of Hutu extremism. Undoubtedly, the assumption of guilt and the fear of being killed during military operations is pushing an increasing number of young men into the bush.

Recently, local people have begun crossing the border into neighbouring Congo-Zaire in flight from the fighting. But they are usually rounded up and pushed back into Rwanda by the Congolese authorities.

Col Kayumba believes that his forces are fighting an estimated 15,000 militiamen in the north-west. He says the rebels have no political or economic agenda and are intent only on killing the Tutsis or chasing them out of the country. "Tutsis, go back to your place of origin or accept to die," read a message scrawled in blue chalk on a wall close to Mudende camp.

The Rwandan government yesterday issued a statement describing the activities of the Hutu militiamen as genocide and said this was the direct responsibility of the international community, which should deal with the situation in that context, although the government made clear it could deal with the military situation itself.

Mary Robinson, the former Irish president and now UN Commissioner for Human Rights, and Madeleine Albright, US Secretary of State have both visited Rwanda in the past 10 days, and voiced their fears about the worsening situation in the north-west.



A woman and her children at a temporary refugee camp which was set up to protect those who survived the massacre at Mudende, in which at least 270 people died. It was the latest attack in an escalating campaign of violence in north-west Rwanda by Hutu militiamen, apparently still committed to the agenda of Tutsi extermination that the world witnessed three years ago. Photograph: Corinne Dufka/Reuters

IT'S SAFE TO DRINK THIS CHRISTMAS



THERE'S NOTHING MADE WITH BOVIL LIKE THIS BOVIL

AS LONG AS YOU BOVIL

DESPITE HUNDREDS TO THE CHURCH, ALL THE OTHERS WHO
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US wary as Iran tries to exorcise its demons

Within hours of Iranian President Khatami's appeal for a 'dialogue' with the United States, Washington was demanding 'deeds, not words' from the Iranian leader. As our Middle East correspondent explains, however, Iran is more anxious than ever to broaden its relationships with the outside world.

Iran has never been so anxious for contact with the outside world as it is today. Even under the Shah, that faithful ally of Washington - the so-called "Light of the Aryans" - Persia was an introverted, xenophobic nation.

All the more ironic, therefore, that the country which its enemies wish to portray as backward, medieval and degenerate should hold out its arms - through its newly elected President Mohamed Khatami - to the United States.

Yet this extraordinary transformation has now come to pass. The internal struggles with the revolution's old guard continue, but Mr Khatami - if he lives long enough to accomplish his ambitions - seems set on bringing Iran back into the comity of nations.

He knows, of course, that Washington's - and Israel's - attempt to isolate Iran has failed: the European Union and the Arabs who gathered for the Islamic summit in Tehran last week have seen to that.

But his remarkable press conference in Tehran on Sunday was a challenge to the US. Even his remarks on the Palestinians at last week's Islamic conference - that they should have a state, an end to occupation, the return of refugees - sounded almost identical to America's official policies on the Middle East.

Talking about "deeds not words" will not improve relations between Washington and Tehran. The US wants to talk about Iran's "terrorism" - something Iran will not admit

to - and its opposition to the now defunct Middle East "peace process", which Mr Khatami says he is against but will not obstruct. Mr Khatami would far rather start with a discussion of the vast amount of money - a cool \$11bn - which the US owes to the pre-revolutionary Iranian regime. And meanwhile he has to face his internal enemies, who claim that any American praise for Iran will signal a betrayal of the Islamic revolution.

He has problems enough to contend with. Earlier this year, when it seemed as if Syria wished to improve its relations with the US, Israeli press reports claimed that "secret contacts" had been made between officials from Damascus and Jerusalem. The story was untrue, but the result predictable: Syria denied the claim, condemned Israel for making it - and angered the Americans. Now the Iranians want to repair their shattered relationship with the US - and are greeted by a similar story.

According to the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, Washington and Tehran began a "clandestine dialogue" in Europe shortly after Mr Khatami's May election. Israel, the paper said, expressed its "concern", while the Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, asked AIPAC - the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee, Israel's most powerful lobby group in the US - to prevent such a change in American policy. *Haaretz* insisted its story came from an unnamed former Clinton administration official who had helped set up the meetings. True or false?

Since Mr Khatami did not take office until August - before which President Rafsanjani remained head of state - it seems an unlikely tale. Mr Khatami may have been an innocent soul when on Sunday he expressed his respect "for the great American people" - as if they had not elected President Clinton - but he is no fool. To open secret talks with the Americans would be to give his Iranian adversaries, especially the religious guide, Ali Khamenei, enough ammunition to call for his impeachment.

No one, of course, has for-



New view: A poster put up in Tehran for the recent Islamic summit depicting 'satanic powers' trying to destroy Islam. Tehran's line is now less extreme

Photograph: Reuters

gotten that Iran, Israel and the US have been deeply involved in each other's affairs since the 1979 revolution. While Washington was secretly supporting Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran, it was co-operating with

BY ROBERT FISK

Israel to buy the freedom of American hostages in Lebanon - with clandestine missile shipments and a covert visit to Iran by Robert McFarlane (along with a Bible from President Reagan, a made-in-Israel cake and a set of duelling pistols).

Mr Rafsanjani broke the story - and thus saved his presidency - before Washington could vouchsafe its own version

of this ridiculous affair. Once it was revealed - by Mr Rafsanjani himself - that US diplomats had travelled to Tehran on fraudulent Irish passports (the originals appear to have been stolen from the Irish embassy in Athens) and once it became known that Mr McFarlane had subsequently tried to kill himself, the Iranian president was safe.

True, the Iranians walk the same corridors as the Americans at the UN. True, too, US officials have put the *mujahedin-qaliq* - Iran's fiercest opponents, with bases in Iraq - on the American list of international "terrorists". But this is a long way from secret dialogue. What President Khatami wants is to de-beastalise Iran, to present his country - with all its problems and flaws and human-rights abuses - as a nation struggling to create civil peace and freedom of thought, some-

thing which Americans supposedly prize in their own society. "At the appropriate time, I'll present my words to the American people," he said in Tehran on Sunday. "I'd hope for a thoughtful dialogue with the American people and through this thoughtful dialogue we could get closer to peace and security and tranquillity." He wanted no more talking with "forked tongues".

And it is probably true that the president intends to open this "dialogue" through the medium of television, through interviews with American journalists and - perhaps - an exchange of academics between both countries.

Even before his election, officials at the ministry of Islamic guidance were circulating copies of an article by the American commentator Milton Viorst which called for a reasoned relationship with Iran.

Saddam toys with UN

The Chief UN weapons inspector, Richard Butler, said yesterday that Iraq was insisting his inspectors could not enter presidential palaces despite his demands for unrestricted access throughout Iraq.

"Iraq has said that will not occur. That is the question that the Security Council will have to consider, whether it is prepared to accept that or not," Mr Butler said after talks with the Iraqi deputy prime minister, Tariq Aziz, yesterday.

Mr Butler said that Iraq was prepared to let inspectors into other sensitive sites "in varying degrees".

Mr Butler's deputy, Charles Duelfer, said earlier that Iraq had given a clearer

picture in the talks of its definition of three categories of inspections sites: "normal" sites where the UN has ongoing inspections, "sensitive" sites which touch on its security concerns, and "presidential" sites.

"On the sites that we are permitted to inspect, they have expressed a willingness to be flexible," he said.

Iraqi officials have been adamant in public statements ahead of the talks that "presidential sites" remain off-limits to the UN.

The issue of access has dogged the inspectors for six years. They say Iraq consistently tried to conceal elements of its weapons programmes and has blocked them from

sites where those items may have been hidden.

With an increased possibility of germ warfare, the US Defense Secretary, William Cohen, has decided America's 1.5 million men and women in uniform will be inoculated against anthrax.

The biological agent can be fatal even in microscopic amounts.

The inoculations, which involve six shots over 18 months, will cost about \$120m (£72m), senior Pentagon officials said yesterday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The concern is for protecting US forces amid a mounting threat of biological or chemical warfare against troops at home or overseas.

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Impotent

It's a man's problem, but it's certainly not a woman's. As a woman's doctor, especially in the house, says "I see you very often there much more lost than the obvious."

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13/HEALTH

Impotence: the woman's story

It's a man's problem, isn't it? Certainly it is. But it's a woman's despair especially because, says Fiona Hanlock, very often there is much more lost than just the obvious.

Women have four different reactions to a man's impotence, says Margaret Ramage, a sexual relationship therapist. First is a feeling that she is not attractive enough or sexy enough. Second is suspicion, the conviction that her partner must be having an affair. "I was sure my partner was seeing someone else," said 30-year-old Susan. "We'd always had a great sex life and then suddenly it stopped, just like that. I was always accusing him, and he would promise me that he had nothing on the side, but I honestly couldn't believe him."

Third is the feeling of relief if the woman never enjoyed sex in the first place. "Sometimes it can be a relief for both partners," says Margaret Ramage. "Some people are not good at making love and never have been and struggle with it throughout their married life, thinking it has to be done because that's what's expected of you in a marriage."

And fourth is the fear that there's something seriously wrong with her man - that he must be suffering from diabetes, or working too hard.

"My husband's been to see three sex therapists," says 49-year-old Jane, married to a man who has been impotent for eight years. "None of them ever wanted to see me, despite the fact that impotency is a joint problem suffered by both partners, not just one. One doctor said to my husband, 'Well, she's 49, so why is she bothered?' Can you believe it? I have felt so terribly rejected. I would cuddle up to him and make all kinds of efforts, but he was just pushed away. I didn't feel feminine any more. I'm a businesswoman and I can take most things but this really floors me. Most people don't realise that impotency doesn't just mean the inability to have



Bed inmates: feelings of rejection, isolation, lack of love that an impotent man's partner may feel are often ignored

Telegraph Colour Library

intercourse. My husband has also lost all desire. So kissing is not even sensual."

"It's extremely important that both partners come for counselling," says Margaret Ramage. "Often the women are more in need of it than the men, but men are against their partners coming to therapy or counselling because they feel so ashamed and feel it's something they have to deal with on their own. They don't realise that sex has a lot more to do with intimacy than an erect penis or even bed. One couple came to me saying they had no sex life and yet they were sitting close, making eye contact, flirting and talking about things they used to do in bed. I said, 'What do you mean you have no sex life? I can see it happening even now, in front of me. Just because you don't achieve penetration doesn't mean you have no sex life.' It's the partnerships in which all in-

timacy is cut out that often break up, not because of the lack of an erection."

Part of the problem is that some men, most of whom see sex in terms of performance, cannot understand that most women see sex in terms of their relationship. So to start with they may try to make love and fail, and then they get so discouraged and anxious that they cannot bear to be cuddly or even kiss for fear it will lead to sex and another failure.

"My man eventually withdrew completely," said Paula, who lived with an impotent man for a year. "First he refused to cuddle up, then he refused to kiss me, then he'd just sneak out of bed in the morning as quickly as possible to avoid any kind of contact. Then he started getting dressed and undressed in another room so I wouldn't see him naked. He stopped holding my hand and he even stopped calling me

"darling." Finally there was no intimacy left at all because he obviously felt that any kind of closeness might lead to a failure in performance, which he couldn't bear. We split up at that point. A therapist I saw said I was taking my man's anxieties on to my own shoulders, and it was his worries about his sexuality I was experiencing, not my own. But I did feel that up to a point I was having to damp down my own sexuality in the face of my partner's lack of potency, and that made me feel even more unsexy and resentful."

Nearly all men have periods of impotence after the age of 45. With long-term problems it's found that many cases of impotence have a medical basis, so partners are often right to worry that their men are ill. It turned out that Jane's husband had diabetes, though not before he'd been to one sex counsellor who encouraged

him to ask his wife to "dress up in sexy clothes and have sex in unusual places, like in a country lane". It made me feel sick. He was then told to stop all carressing and touching for 10 weeks and then gradually to start massaging each other. All I wanted was for someone to actually talk to me. I was going through hell and back. The partner in impotence is totally ignored and any trauma you may be going through yourself with feelings of total rejection, isolation, lack of love, are just left for you to deal with. And what is worse is that because it is such a personal problem and you want to be loyal to your partner, you can't talk about it to anyone, not even family or friends."

What about other ways of having sex? Unfortunately, an impotent man is often reluctant to try this because any hint of sex reminds him of his failure and therefore, however kind

and unselfish he may be, he can't bear to give his partner sexual pleasure manually because he believes that penetration, erection and orgasm is everything. "Anyway, other ways of having sex are not the same; you want to feel wanted," says Jane.

There are many more medical treatments on offer than there used to be. Injections can cause erections and even enable the man to ejaculate; vacuum pumps are more difficult to use, but they can often work successfully - they can make a man have an orgasm but not ejaculate. But many couples find them distasteful until they get used to them.

"The problem is that these treatments are not providing the cure they should," says Margaret Ramage. "They simply address the erection problem, when in fact women's anxieties should be addressed as well as men's."

Keeping Father Christmas fit for duty

Every year, as Christmas approaches, Santa Claus visits his local health centre for a check-up. We have had an exclusive look at his doctor's report.

Name: Mr S Claus, aka Father Christmas, St Nicholas, St Nick.
Age: approx 1,717 (born AD 280).
Marital status: single, but lives with numerous elves and several animal companions.
Nationality: originally from Asia Minor, now lives at North Pole.

Occupation: an early Christian bishop turned toy-deliverer. Also the patron saint of children and seafarers.
Comment: Mr Claus is in remarkably good shape for a man of his age. (He already exceeds the life expectancy of the average European by 1,648 years.) However, his large waist circumference and higher than recommended body mass make him vulnerable to heart disease and diabetes.
Recommendation: he should eat fewer mince pies (200 calories each) and consume at least five portions of fresh fruit and vegetables a day.

Comment: Mr Claus informs me that he prefers his sleigh to cruise at 10,000 metres to avoid bad weather and I am therefore concerned about his vulnerability to altitude sickness. I am also worried that, when he enters UK airspace, he might be mistakenly identified on radar as an intruder and shot down.

Recommendation: he should ensure that his sleigh keeps below 3,000 metres at all times. If he does go higher, he will need to carry oxygen. Having consulted the RAF on his behalf, I have advised him to file a flight plan prior to departure and install an identifying transponder. In any event, so long as he shows no hostile intent, I am assured he will be escorted safely into UK airspace.

Comment: the Met Office informs me that the temperature in Finnish Lapland at 6pm last Christmas Eve was -20C. In London, it was -1C and in Glasgow -2C. The patient is clearly at considerable risk of hypothermia and frostbite.
Recommendation: Warm clothing is essential. The British Mountaineering Council tells me he should wear six layers of clothing, including three inner layers of thermal insulation and an all-in-one down suit; three pairs of gloves; three pairs of socks and plastic boots; a tubular scarf; and a balaclava, hat and hood.

Comment: Mr Claus says he enjoys a glass of whisky in each house he visits. (There are over 7 million households with children in Britain alone.) While he feels the alcohol could help reduce his risk of heart disease, I consider the consumption of several million units of alcohol in one night makes severe intoxication inevitable and death a serious possibility.

Recommendation: The patient has been advised to have "none for the road" and, even when not driving, to limit his intake to four units a day. Given his obvious alcohol dependency, this will be a struggle but counselling is available. Mr Claus may wish to drink Coca-Cola instead but he should be aware that each 330ml can contains the equivalent of seven teaspoons of sugar.

Comment: Mr Claus's occupation carries considerable risks: exposure to soot in the chimneys through which he frequently descends can cause skin and lung cancers as well as ulcers on the corneal surface of the eye; climbing up and down roofs and chimneys presents obvious risks of falling; and back trouble could result from lifting a heavy sack of presents.

Recommendation: the Health and Safety Executive warns that work at a height exceeding two metres requires either scaffolding or firmly secured ladders. I have therefore advised Mr Claus to enter buildings only by the front door. (If he insists on using his traditional route, goggles, a face mask and hard hat will be essential.) Attendance at a training course on safe lifting techniques is also recommended.

Comment: on Christmas Eve, Mr Claus has to complete a heavy workload before a fixed deadline. Stress and fatigue are inevitable, increasing the risk of irritability, mood swings, errors and accidents.

Recommendation: the patient should tackle his stress by taking up meditation or yoga. The colour red can cause an increase in heart rate and blood pressure so he should consider changing his coat to a more relaxing blue. He should spread his workload over several nights or, better still, change to a daytime shift.

Comment: Mr Claus is required to work in close proximity to large numbers of children in air-conditioned shopping malls. This increases the likelihood of colds and flu.

Recommendation: given the patient's age, a flu vaccination is advisable. He should also increase his immunity by regular moderate exercise (this will also help him lose weight) and taking a vitamin supplement.

Peter Baker



DR PHIL HAMMOND

EastEnders has come in for a bit of stick with Bianca and Ricky's abnormal baby dilemma but, from what I have seen of it, the observation and dialogue have been superb. "What do we do? Kill this one and keep the next? Keep getting rid of them until a good one comes up? I don't feel we have the right to make a choice." In the end they did, deciding that a child with a combination of spina bifida and hydrocephalus was more than they could cope with. That was

Folic acid - the agony of ignorance

a few episodes ago, but their guilt will last the lifetime of the soap.

This isn't helped when a doctor points out that the baby probably would have been healthy if Bianca had taken folic acid supplements before and during pregnancy. Since it wasn't planned, not a single supplement passed Bianca's lips. At present, preventing your baby from having a crippling disease is only an option for those couples who map out their future family on a Psion organiser. And there aren't many of them in Albert Square.

EastEnders has a proud tradition of newsy health storylines (Mark's HIV, Peggy's breast cancer, Jo's schizophrenia) but it has taken them six years to pick up on folic acid. Way back in 1991, the Medical Research Council's Vitamin Study Group announced that the incidence of neural tube defects such as spina bifida could be reduced by 75 per cent if all pregnant women took

400mcg of folic acid each day from three months before conception to the end of the 12th week of pregnancy. It was an amazing discovery that has achieved virtually nothing.

Professional and public awareness remained low and by 1996, a pitiful 9 per cent of women had even heard about folic acid. This spurred the Health Education Authority into a very expensive advertising campaign (remember Zoe Wamaker and the retreating sperm?). Six months later, a large survey found that although 93 per cent of women had now heard about folic acid and 71 per cent of mothers took it at some stage during pregnancy, only one in 10 took it from well before conception to week 12 - the time needed for it to be effective.

At present, a thousand couples a year suffer the trauma of miscarriages and late terminations and 150 give birth to se-

verely handicapped children, most of whom would have normal spines but for a short course of a cheap, safe, water-soluble vitamin. Health education in itself will continue to achieve nothing whilst 35-50 per cent of pregnancies are unplanned. Even if all women ate more folate-rich green vegetables, the effect would be minimal because naturally occurring folate is hard to absorb from the gut and is destroyed by cooking. In raw form, you'd need to eat six pounds of sprouts a day to absorb the amount needed and you're unlikely to feel like sex afterwards.

In 1996, the US Center for Disease Control recognised that health education and over-the-counter tablets would never deliver a significant reduction in neural tube defects (NTDs), especially since their prevalence is greatest among the young and poor who don't plan pregnancies and are less aware

of health issues. American food manufacturers were ordered to add folic acid to flour and a variety of staple foodstuffs as the only realistic chance of prevention. This comes into effect from January 1998.

In the UK we're much more reticent about adding things to the food chain. But folic acid is already added to 15 per cent of breads and 50 per cent of cereals, although it would take 12 slices of four halves a day to prevent NTDs. Adding enough to flour so that everyone got 400mcg from six two slices of bread would not affect the taste of meet objections from millers. Neither would it be expensive - the money wasted on ineffective health education could have funded the programme for several years.

There is one argument against fortification - a very rare but potentially serious neurological side effect of folic acid can occur in elderly people with un-

treated Vitamin B12 deficiency. However, there is also a strong association between folic acid intake and the prevention of heart disease, which is likely to be of far more benefit to the elderly. If this proves to be the case, fortification is the only humane option. Although NTDs are rare, affecting only 0.3 per 1,000 live births, it is presently only abortion that prevents them from being 10 times as common. Folic acid is a far kinder and cheaper form of prevention, with the added benefit that you have a healthy baby at the end. For those who did the research, the knowledge that 7,000 pregnancies have since ended that could have been saved, and 1,000 children with spina bifida could have had normal spines must be hard to take.

Today Helen Brinton MP tabled an Early Day Motion in the House of Commons calling for the addition of folic acid to flour

VITAL SIGNS

A delicate balance
Doctors cannot get it right. Either they are accused of patronising patients by withholding information or they are accused of avoiding responsibility by overloading them with it. An illustration of the problem comes from researchers in Hull who interviewed patients with terminal cancer about how satisfied they felt with the information they had received about their illness.

One quarter of the patients were frustrated that the doctor

avoided the word "cancer", but an almost equal number (18 per cent) wanted "less frightening words used such as tumour".

Justin Gore, one of the researchers, who presented the findings to the winter meeting of the British Thoracic Society said: "Even where honesty is the policy and experienced doctors are at hand, it is very hard to deliver bad news to patient and meet individual needs."

Diabetes on the increase
Cases of diabetes are set to dou-

ble worldwide over the next decade. A study by the British Diabetic Association published in Diabetic Medicine estimates that there are 123 million with the condition in the world today and that this number will grow to 220 million by the year 2010.

Asia and Africa will feel the brunt of the rise and Asia will be home to 61 per cent of diabetics in 2010. Professor George Alberti, vice-chairman of the association and president of the Royal College of Physicians, said: "This research paints a very bleak picture. It is vital that attempts to change lifestyle are stepped up and that investment in finding a cure is increased."

Seeing double

The average amount spent on spectacles was \$5.14 last year, down from £9.25 the year be-

fore, despite the growing popularity of designer frames. The total number of contact lenses sold doubled from 25.8 million to 47.2 million but most of the increase was due to the growth in sales of disposable lenses. There were 14.6 million sight tests, just over half of which were carried out on the NHS.

Embarrassing evidence

Embarrassment can be a fatal condition. In the case of cancer of the bowel, the second biggest cancer killer, there is evidence that embarrassment is sending thousands of patients to unnecessary deaths, covering up low standards and keeping the cancer out of the public eye.

Cure rates for bowel cancer vary widely between hospitals and between surgeons, and lives could be saved if treatment were concentrated in the hands

of the best, according to new guidelines issued by the health department.

Bowel cancer killed over 17,500 people in 1996 but, unlike most common cancers, is completely curable if caught early. Its curability is linked to the fact that it remains localised until relatively advanced. If the cancer is removed completely there is a good chance it will not recur. However, only a minority of patients get ideal treatment.

Diagnosis is frequently delayed because patients are embarrassed to consult their GPs about the early signs, such as blood in the faeces. Most who need surgery are operated on by general surgeons who do not have the specialist skills necessary to ensure all the cancer is removed.

The guidance, sent to all

GPs, Health Authorities and NHS Trusts, says studies in Scotland show that survival after five years varies from 20 per cent to 60 per cent depending on the surgeon carrying out the operation. One hospital had twice the failure rate of others. The low overall survival rate is linked with the advanced stage of the cancers at diagnosis.

It says surgery should be restricted to those surgeons who show good results with low recurrence rates. The best results, which halve the risk of the cancer recurring, are achieved by a complex operation involving meticulous dissection of the tissues surrounding the rectum. Known as Total Mesorectal Excision (TME) it requires specialist training and is currently carried out by only a "limited number of surgeons".

Radiotherapy given before surgery reduces recurrence rates by up to 40 per cent but patients who get radiotherapy tend to have it after surgery when it is less effective, lasts longer and causes more damage to other tissues. Chemotherapy increases survival by 6 per cent.

The guidance is based on a review of research by the NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination at the University of York. Arabella Melville, chief author of the review, said: "The variations in treatment are much more serious with this cancer than with others. But it doesn't have a high profile. It is not something people want to know about. Thousands of lives could be saved every year by following this guidance."

Jeremy Lawrence

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The irony and the ecstasy: Thomas Joshua Cooper's high-visionary 'Atlantic Ocean, Ardnamurchan Point', 1990 (above) and Massimo Vitali's piss-taking 'Marina Pietrasanta' 1994 (below)

The Photographers' Gallery

Alone, alone, all, all alone, alone on a wide, wide sea!

'Worth seeing? Yes; but not worth going to sea' (as Dr Johnson very nearly said). Tom Lubbock contrasts the sea-pictures of two photographers whose work appears oceans apart.

The film *Waterworld* raised an interesting problem about representing the sea. The film's premise was that sea levels had risen so high that ocean covered the whole planet. Water was literally everywhere, there was no more land, everybody was a sailor – a frightening thought. The problem was

that the scale of this new Flood couldn't be directly pictured. Sure, they could show the sea stretching away to the horizon in all directions; but when you're in the middle of it, that's how the sea looks anyway. *Waterworld* couldn't supply the eye with any more water than the average dolphin-movie. The

sea always looks infinite. Its immensities are a pictorial cliché.

There's a good deal of sea in Thomas Joshua Cooper's pictures. This American photographer, resident in Scotland for a long time, has 10 years' work now showing at the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh, with the title "Where the Rivers Flow", and there's a good deal of river here too, and rock. But it's the sea pictures that take the strongest hold. They're not enormous, but they fill the eye and the mind.

Cooper's sea doesn't look infinite in the normal way, and the reason is simple enough. The horizon is kept out of the frame. The sea fills the scene. The limits these photos dwell on aren't the horizon's vanishing lines; rather, the land's edges. They're all taken on shore or just off-shore, at extreme points of coastline – the westernmost points of Europe, say, around Cape St Vincent in Portugal, or the northernmost points of Scotland, Ireland and Wales, or on the English Channel, or the far reaches of the Scottish islands.

Rocks rise and waves break, but they aren't views, strictly speaking, and their sense of scale is uncertain. It's the sea, its surface, its depths, its movement, that makes the going. Take an image like *Atlantic Ocean, Ardnamurchan Point*. A mariner or a hydrologist might be able to say what was going on precisely, but what the viewer sees is a ferment of swelling, breaking water. A slow exposure has allowed the foam to streak into a field of flames – flames that lick over the surface like a petrol fire – which rises to a vortex of maximum intensity in the centre of the picture, emanating a kind of light-halo; and, beyond that, there's obscurity, in which (if you look closer) the approaching waves are stroked in dark-on-dark with a beautiful fine-brush delicacy.

Elsewhere the water writhes and twists like muscles under skin, or lies hard and grooved like the face of the moon, or becomes an abyss of smoke or a desert struck with flashes and bursts. Beyond the effects of slow exposure, Cooper's tones and textures are worked up in the printing with

rare precision (though I'm not sure that I quite believe that halo). The pictures are generally sombre, and their dim illumination – evening, early morning, sometimes moonlight – unifies them; but it's remarkable how, with such narrow contrasts, they achieve such clear resolution. It is a masterly touch at work. One can hardly avoid talking the language of painting or etching. The sea is made into its own abstraction, or, at any rate, is getting high visionary treatment.

It seems important to say something about how Cooper operates. These photos involved a lot of trekking and wading, armed with a big 100-year-old box camera and a tripod: a long period of watching and waiting, sometimes waist-deep in water; and then a single picture is taken, with exposure times that are never snaps and can last for hours. I give this information, with its intimations of ritual – quest, solitude, meditation, unique act – as everyone who writes about Cooper gives it, although myself not quite sure what to make of it. It offers background support for the images' intensity, but, having read it into them, can you read it back out? You're conscious of the duration

of the exposures, yes, though generally they're not that prolonged, and every photographic image implies a photographic act of which one can be vaguely aware. But with Cooper's work the two seem in fact to be peculiarly divorced, because of the great proportion of the picture-making done in the studio.

I feel a similar thing about the sense of place. Again, photos generally make you think of their real location more keenly than paintings do, and these are charged sites that Cooper visits, indeed the ends of the earth – intimating the limits of a culture, or the beginnings of a great expansion. The title of one sequence, portraying the sea off the Isle of Lewis, is *At the End of the World (The Edge of the Celtic World)*. Another: *The World's Edge. Remembering Magellan – The Atlantic Ocean, Five Capes – Portugal (The Edge of the Renaissance World)*.

So the titles indicate. And yet the actual sense of place is weak. You rarely feel that here is offered an impressive sight you might see yourself (landmarks are few). Nor, on the other hand, that the photographer's sharp eye has made a strange formal *monvex* that plays against the

real subject (the sort of transforming find that might occur in an Edward Weston sea-view). But just this seems to me Cooper's strength. He doesn't have that sort of sharp eye, nor an eye for the simply dramatic. His sea is treated abstractly, visionarily, but in a way very objectively. It's the same thing: with the sea, abstract and concrete, subjective and objective are one. These pictures are true because they are immersed.

But no doubt they want something more, a resonance that their charged place names and ritual procedures point to. They want to be an epiphany of the sacred. I too feel in an obscure way that the sea should be revered, but without treading too far down mystical or transcendental ways; and I'm reluctant to praise work for believing things I don't. Suffice to say that there's great intensity of attention here, and an opportunity for it in the viewer too, and that's value enough.

At the Photographers' Gallery in London, you can get another view of the sea, from the Italian photographer Massimo Vitali. It adopts, in almost every way, the opposite angle. Vitali's camera is set up in the sea, but

turned on to the beach – on beaches packed with baskers and bathers and strollers. These huge, high-angled colour pictures set out wide panoramas of modern seaside leisure, with their patterns of little encampments of parasols, loungers and spread towels. (Beach life is a beginners' exercise when you study Demography.) The effect can't help being ironic.

Certainly an overflowing beach isn't my idea of fun either, and one can well agree that collective relaxation is a very rule-bound affair. But these pictures are too dependent on the simple observation that people enjoying themselves tend to look silly or helpless when you can't see what it is they're enjoying. And what's missing from these scenes – deliberately removed, by turning the view round – is their real focal point: the water stretching out before them. People don't just go to the seaside to get hot and wet. They go to be in the strengthening presence of the sea. It's no good taking the piss.

Cooper: to 10 Jan, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh (0131-225 2383). Vitali: to 17 Jan, Photographers' Gallery, London (0171-831 1772)



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I had to sell myself but not be a prostitute

REVELATIONS

THE TIME: 1996

THE PLACE: MAYFAIR

THE MAN: JEAN-CHRISTOPHE NOVELLI - CHEF AND RESTAURATEUR

I was the chef at the Four Seasons Hotel in Mayfair - a good secure job - but I felt I had the potential to do more. I woke up one morning and knew my wheels were spinning in mud. Instead of going to work, I went to visit my friend Marco Pierre White in his restaurant. We sat down for coffee and he saw there was a problem straight away. "Jean, you should start your own place," he advised.

My problem was that I didn't have any money. But Marco knew somewhere for sale. "It's the perfect place for you," he said. We went for a dinner of goat's cheese and steak to a part of London I had never been to before - Clerkenwell. When I saw the environment, after Park Lane, I thought he was joking! It was called the café St Pierre and not at all upmarket; I felt like jumping from a plane. After a long chat, Marco convinced me to come back in daylight at lunch time. The next day I returned and the area was busy with city types, although the café was quiet.

I asked Marco why he had been so convinced about the place. He told me that 10 years ago he had been the head chef there. We managed to knock a third off the price of the sale. Unfortunately, NatWest offered me only 70 per cent of what I needed so I had to think about a partner. Thank goodness I decided against the idea because for just £40,000 somebody would now own half of my business. (My company is worth £3.2m after just 18 months.) I had to sell myself but not be a prostitute.

I was still at the Four Seasons; they knew nothing about the venture or they would have sacked me. So to raise the extra money I worked on a cross-channel ferry between Dover and Calais at the weekend. Five days a week I was one of the top chefs in the UK in a Michelin star restaurant; but on my days off I cooked egg, chips and beans! It is very difficult to work on a boat: I was sea sick. I couldn't stand up in heavy weather. But I had to do it because that money was just enough to buy the place. I never thought of giving up because I can absorb a lot of problems - that is my virtue. Finally I bought a lease for 20 years. But for the first three months I didn't have the landlord's consent. He wanted £20,000 guarantee to prove that I could pay the rent, but I didn't have the money. So he was waiting to see if I could pay - if not I would have lost everything.

I had been working in one of the most beautiful restaurants in London, and in my own place I had to use school tables and white metal chairs. I did not even have my name on the front because I couldn't afford the signwriter. I had a week's salary from my old job that I used for cash flow to buy wine and food. I was very lucky because three staff came for just £150 to help me. I said, "If you work, I'll give you shares." We suffered. I was working like a dog from early morning to late at night. In fact we slept there because the terrines were in the oven and there was preparation to do for the next day. At the weekend, I would clean and paint.

I had the same spirit, the same passion, the same love for food as I always had but I couldn't buy expensive produce. I had to go to the market and buy the most economical ingredients. Diners paid £150 a head at the Four Seasons but in my café-



'Everybody tells me that I have to look after myself but I swear that if I become bankrupt tomorrow I will shoot myself. I will never work for someone else'

Photograph: Glyn Griffiths

restaurant I used to provide the same concept in a much cheaper way. I was charging £3.50 for a starter and £6.95 for a main course. A month later I was almost bankrupt because my cash flow was low. I had some overheads I wasn't expecting and my takings were not big enough.

I'm willing to risk everything I've got but I knew that physically I was going to die: you can only work so hard. I was walking around thinking, "I'm finished". I told no one; I didn't want to discourage them. One Sunday I went to Covent Garden and drank a coffee in a café and on the table there was a newspaper. In it was an advert for a loan shark - quick money at a high rate of interest (22 per cent). I rang and pretended that I still worked for the Four Seasons and needed £10,000 to re-do my flat. Every morning I was checking the post, and there was nothing. A week later they sent me a cheque. I couldn't believe it. I've never cried in my life but I nearly cried that day. I said, "Thank God." That was my last bullet to survive. Even if one day I have £10 million in my pocket, I will never forget that cheque.

Shortly afterwards, a small man and his daughter came to eat and he asked me my name and complimented me on the food. He wanted to look around. I was frightened that he was a hygiene inspector! Finally, he said, "When you were the chef at the Four Seasons, I ate there. Today I didn't pay the same price but I can assure you the meal was exactly the same." I thanked him, he paid the bill and revealed that he was a jour-

nalist from *Time Out*.

When the review was published, there was a queue outside and not enough food in my fridge. I was fully booked and in one month my turnover grew to more than 10 times its previous size. From £4,500 pounds a week, I started taking £65,000, which was nearly the amount of my original loan from the bank. I got a result and I will never forget that excitement. However, the toughest moment is now. Eighteen months ago, I had only four staff but now I employ 100 people. Everything has become so large it is uncontrollable. It is hard, my name is 10 times bigger, but when I go back home to bed I am still a human being. I have to take a sleeping tablet and I wake up in the morning and become an animal.

If I do not have the fighting instinct I know I will die, so I have to be like that every day. On a Sunday, if I take time off, I become a zombie because my brain can't cope with being slow. Once I took off three days and I was ill, there was not enough adrenaline coming in. It's a very narrow world in the kitchen. The greatest people are more expressive but it is not a life. It is impossible, I promise you - it kills you. I have no interests except work and the time I spend with my girlfriend or my friends - especially Marco Pierre White. I don't go to the pictures. I don't watch TV or read newspapers. My life is a very strict and rigid formula. I don't get paid a wage, every penny goes back into the business. I don't care where I live. I could buy a house tomorrow but I still rent a one-bedroom flat. Money is irrelevant; I take cash out of the till if I need a taxi. I'm happy with nothing. Expressing myself and to prove a point is much more important. I'm happy but exhausted. I slept just four hours last night. I had a banana this morning but I haven't eaten all

Five days a week I was one of the top chefs in the UK in a Michelin star restaurant; at weekends I worked on a cross-channel ferry cooking eggs, chips and beans

day - just two litres of coffee and a packet of cigarettes. Everybody tells me that I have to be careful and look after myself but I swear that if I become bankrupt tomorrow I will shoot myself. I will never work for someone else. What has happened is unique. I don't want to regret anything. There is so much competition, it is like football and music. One minute superb, the next - out!

I don't want to go back to where I came from. Growing up in France was hard, my

parents didn't have any money. My mother caught polio in a public pond when she was only four. This was during the war. She was paralysed up to the neck and the whole family walked from the North down to the South to avoid the Germans. She has recovered to some extent and is now only paralysed to the hip but she could never ride a bicycle or drive a car. Her life was very limited and I was too hyperactive for her. As a boy, I nearly died. I would jump from the roof of one house to another. I fell and my jumper caught on a nail sticking out of the gutter. My friends pulled me up by the neck and nearly strangled me. I just had to risk things. I would knock myself against walls. I was completely crazy. At school I couldn't stay at my desk and always had to speak so I was put on tablets. One day they actually tied me to my chair because I disrupted the class. I used to hate the routine. Finally, aged 10, I was sent to the transition class for people who are thick. I was there for four years, but I wasn't thick. I was disturbed. I didn't know how to express myself.

We lived near a bakery and every morning when I went to school I used to see the lights in the basement and would stop to watch the men working away in their white coats. I liked the smell and the warmth. I started working in the bakery at weekends from 6am until 11 at night. But one day there was a terrible accident. The apprentice got crushed in the blender, they couldn't stop him being dragged in and he

died. After that I was not allowed to go back. Times were tough and I was misunderstood; I was thrown out of school. They told me I was wasting my time. I was 14. I am lucky, but the reason I am successful is not that I am a good chef or have a good formula, it's because I persist and I don't worry. For my French National Service I was trained as a blue beret and sent to the Lebanon. It was very intensive. I learnt to be myself under pressure.

I had a million reasons to close up and push the keys under the door of my first restaurant but I did not panic. I now have six places, four in London and one in France and South Africa. I have paid for everything myself. Next year I have my own television series and I will be featured on a commercial for Sen France, the cross-channel ferry I previously worked for, promoting their gastronomic menu. I've learnt a valuable lesson - the importance of being accessible. I'm very excited about introducing top-level food to people who've not been able to afford it before. London is becoming the European gastronomic city and I know I have to improve or I will be back where I started. But I've survived a lot - it has to be something much bigger to destroy me.

Jean-Christophe Novelli's restaurants include Maison Novelli, Novelli W8, Novelli EC1 and Les Saveurs de Jean-Christophe Novelli.

Interview by Andrew G Marshall

A recipe for a crumbling ego

Eventually the food was fine, but the marriage was left red raw. When it comes to dinner parties, says Melissa Nathan, that's the way it has to be.

A old aunt of mine used to say, "you can read, you can cook". At the start of a cooking session I always find this wonderfully inspiring. It's only an hour later, with an aching back, flour in my eye and one failed attempt already in the bin, that I remember the old bat was totallyarking. And that I detest everything about cooking.

I hate deciding what to make, shopping for ridiculous amounts of bizarre ingredients and then turning my kitchen into a warzone for a meal that takes five minutes to devour. So the Other Half and I live on simple, quick, unimaginative meals. But when it comes to dinner parties, there's a right and a wrong way to do things. The right way is to get flustered, angry and violent over a hot stove while telling your Other Half it's alright for you, all you have to do is pour the wine. It's known as Scratch Cooking - or

in my kitchen Scream Cooking - and call me a traditionalist but that's the way it should be done. The Other Half vehemently disagrees. He thinks we should buy everything pre-cooked, pre-packed and preposterously expensive.

So when he invited a new friend from work - plus girlfriend - to dinner one Saturday evening, we'd done the legwork on this familiar row so many times we were able to leap in halfway through. Quite sweet really.

"I am not spending the day with you in a foul mood, so we'll buy it all," he said firmly. He'll never forget my amazing sinking scones ... flying towards his head'

"Don't be ridiculous," I snapped even more firmly, "you don't invite people over to humiliate them."

We compromised. We went for a simple starter - steamed asparagus with hollandaise sauce (shop-bought) and garlic bread (shop-bought) followed by a baked pasta dish - made by Other Half on the day - followed by apple crumble made by me the day before. That way I'd only be making one easy dish. What

could possibly go wrong?

Well, let me explain. I got up at seven on Friday morning. I got all the crumble ingredients out. I rearranged them. I took the recipe book out. First horror-filled moment of the day. I realised that this recipe was just

'He'll never forget my amazing sinking scones ... flying towards his head'

a basic guide, full of phrases like "if your recipe states..." I felt a knot of anxiety form in my stomach. I rearranged the ingredients. I took a deep breath. The guests weren't expected for another 36 hours. I'd cope. I'd do what any other mature adult would do in the same situation. I called my mother.

"You have to help," I said dramatically. "It's my dinner."

"Thank God," she said, "I thought it was important."

"It is important," I

screamed. I am without a crumble recipe." I realised I'd stopped breathing. "Do you have one?"

"No," she said apologetically. "I've never really used one. Crumble is foolproof."

I began to make small whimpering noises and picked absently at the sugar (soft dark brown) while a tear welled up in my eye (salty).

"Read it to me," she said calmly.

I read it out full.

"That's a recipe," she said. "What more do you want, semaphore?"

There was a long pause.

"OK. Bye"

I put the phone down. Mothers can sometimes find it hard to let go.

I mixed together the ingredients in a bowl - and then ate half of it. Why does it always taste so much better raw? I put it in the oven and within 40 minutes the smell wafted up the stairs where I was getting out of my shower.

A minute later, the knot was back in my stomach. Other Half and I were examining the crumble intently.

"It's burnt," I whispered.

"No it's not," he lied firmly.

"I burnt it. I failed at the foolproof crumble. I'm crap. I'm going to have to make another one. It's alright for you, all you have to do" etc...

At that point Other Half went out for the afternoon to save our marriage. While he was out, I bought more butter and started again. This time I crouched in front of the oven and watched it cook. It wasn't just a load of ingredients in there, it was also my self respect. Oh yes, plus my sense of humour and sense of proportion. When it came out, I quality assurance tested so much of it that it looked like a ring doughnut. But it tasted good. I decided to serve it in the kitchen.

By the time our guests came, Other Half and I weren't talking. I always find that adds a certain piquancy to a dinner party. But amazingly, the food was OK. Or maybe our guests were just polite.

"I'm so impressed you didn't just go out and buy it all," said Tim. "If you came to us, it would all be shop-bought, you know."

Other Half froze. I laughed gaily. "How delightful," I trilled. And meant it.

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هَذَا مِنْ الْأَصْلِ

A true story that puts the police in the dock



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Here is a true story, drawn from recent weeks. A youngish man went to his office Christmas party at a West End club. He had a few to drink, but left at around 11pm, reasonably early because there were young children at home, so he expected to be woken early. Sensibly, he wasn't driving, and set off in search of a taxi cab.

Just as he stepped out to cross the road a car came shooting past, and a siren suddenly blared out. He jumped back from the kerb in alarm, and, unwisely but not entirely surprisingly, shouted a foul-mouthed curse at the rapidly receding vehicle.

The vehicle was a police patrol car. As the man walked off, its driver scooted round a side street, eventually pulling up a little ahead. A large police officer jumped from the passenger side and marched up to our party-goer.

"Just wait here, my mate wants a word with you," the police officer said. Whereupon the officer driving the car emerged,

walked up, and started jabbing his finger towards our friend's chest. Our friend was not daft, and had not drunk so much as to be unaware that he should remain conciliatory. Which he did. But the police officer did not. He culminated his rant by declaring: "If you're not careful I'll have you down the station in a cell and really sort you out."

Astonished by this, our party-goer turned to a passing woman, and asked: "Did you hear what he just said? Did he say what I thought he said?" "Yes, indeed," she replied, "and I'm as astonished as you."

"Would you mind coming the police station and helping me file a complaint?" "Not at all," she replied, and off they went.

At the station, the party-goer then attempted to tell his tale. The attention he received was cursory. He demanded to see whoever was in charge. The officer who came in suggested that he'd had a bit to drink, and that in the cold light of day he might change his mind. It wasn't until the

party-goer pointed out that he was a trained lawyer, and was determined to pursue his complaint, that the officer started to take it seriously.

When this story is told among normal, law-abiding people in London, none of them express surprise. Amazingly, they regard it as perfectly normal. And that is perhaps even more shocking than the event itself. Expectations of the behaviour of Metropolitan Police officers are appallingly low. People are very well aware that far and away the majority of police officers, even in the metropolis, are decent human beings who exercise enormous restraint and skilled judgment in the face of all kinds of stress and provocation. But it is virtually impossible to find a London citizen who has not had some bad experience or other with the Met. It is as common as being driven demented by the miseries of the Tube, or fed up with right-wing cabbies. It's part of the life of the city. And it shouldn't be. In truth, it's a scandalous state of affairs to have - as we reported exclusively this morning - the largest police force in the country receiving 10,000 complaints from the public, leading to only 20 officers being disciplined. Of course, many of those complaints are diversions; they come from criminals and trouble-makers who want to cause problems for officers who are doing their duty as best they can. But that simply cannot account for the difference between 10,000 complaints and only 20 officers disciplined. It is too shockingly wide a gap to be explained in anything other than the obvious way: that officers get away scot-free, that members of the public are deterred from pursuing complaints, and that corruption and misbehaviour are swept under the nearest filing cabinet.

Every time that happens to a legitimate complaint, public faith in the police is undermined. Police forces cannot with one face encourage the public to come forward and help them in their often difficult task,

while with another refuse to countenance the possibility that some of their colleagues are either nasty, or rotten. And it is no excuse whatever to say that some of the bad officers are shuffled away to retirement on health grounds. Far too much of that kind of evasion happens in the public service; it undermines accountability, and fails in the crucial objective of bolstering public esteem.

London (and the rest of Britain, indeed, but the problem is particularly acute in the capital) need police forces they can trust. Sir Paul Condon knows this, and knows that he needs to find a way of rooting out the 250-odd officers he believes are corrupt.

Obviously, tackling corruption matters more than common civility. But if any officer thinks it is acceptable to threaten to beat anyone up in a cell, whether or not they have committed an offence, he should be out of the force without ado. And be seen to be dismissed, too.

Post letters to Letters to the Editor and include a daytime telephone number. Fax 0171 293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk. E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

LETTERS

Now build on Kyoto

Sir: The climate change treaty hammered out at Kyoto was a political breakthrough. For the first time, a statutory global protocol mandates industrial nations to cut emissions of the six main greenhouse gases within a definite period. Countries like the US, the world's worst climate polluter and implacably opposed to any such agreement beforehand, were forced to compromise.

But it's not nearly enough. To stabilise climate change and sea-level rise, protect vital forest and other life systems along with heavily populated coastal regions, cuts of between 60 and 80 per cent must be achieved within 50 years.

Next year is critical, for ratification and first-step implementation. The two are linked. The US Senate is threatening to veto the treaty, arguing it will be bad for the economy and that newly industrialising countries, like China and India, should agree their own cuts.

The UK has another vital leadership role to play to overcome these hurdles, by demonstrating that cutting emissions is good for the economy and people. Friends of the Earth, using EU economic forecasting models, has shown that meeting the UK's carbon dioxide reduction target of 20 per cent by 2010 can create up to 225,000 new jobs, through affordable domestic energy conservation measures, renewable supply (off-shore wind, wave, solar and combined heat and power) programmes, reducing traffic levels and building up a modern public transport network.

The Government must back the Road Traffic Reduction Bill before Parliament, and implement the policy, green taxation and public expenditure needed. As employment and profitable green technology export opportunities materialise for the UK and Europe, while emissions fall, the US and others will see it is worth following suit - or risk losing market share and competitiveness. Essential and much tougher reduction targets will then be easier to negotiate at future climate summits, using Kyoto's legal foundation.

CHARLES SECRET
Director, Friends of the Earth
London N1

Sir: For the world to agree a single accord on anything as nebulous as climate is remarkable.



Unfortunately the result is a late-20th-century affirmation that colonialism rules.

With the plan for trading in emissions permits, the United States has badgered the rest of the world into accepting a new commodity for marketing, a new way for them to extend financial hegemony over economies struggling to emerge.

Most third world countries have difficulty developing their economies for the benefit of their own populations because they are struggling to pay off debts they have been seduced into by the developed nations. Now a new form of selling their seed corn - their ability to develop industry - has been invented which will ensure that they will only continue to be able to develop at the rate the US allows, since the US will decide whether or not to dangle the carrot of more foreign exchange in return for their greenhouse gases.

Which now is the evil empire? DAVID CHOAT
Shepperton, Middlesex

Sir: Nicholas Schoon's reporting has been a model of its kind. Rightly he points the finger of blame at the multinationals and governments which are so largely responsible for failure to reach a more meaningful agreement in Kyoto ("Getting warmer, but still a long way from our goal", 12 December).

The best way to show our deep disgust is to hit them in the pocket. I am sure that I shall not be alone in boycotting products of Esso, Mobil and other members of the notorious Global Climate Coalition.

JOHN GORDON
London N6

Labour vs 'Today'

Sir: Your report "Labour at war with Today" (13 December) on the exchange of letters between BCC Radio's John Barton and Labour's director of communications, David Hill, after the Harriet Harman inter-

view raises worrying questions. Not least, who is answerable to whom?

A minister's salary, like the whole apparatus of government, of whatever party, is paid from the public purse: minister and government are answerable to the public on matters of public interest. This should have nothing to do with party officials.

Mr Barton, and all members of news media seeking official access to ministers on matters of policy, should bypass Mr Hill and go straight to the civil servant responsible. If this turns out to be one and the same person, as seems to be Peter Mandelson's aim, that person should be under obligation to act as civil, rather than party, servant.

It is grotesque that a party official should take it upon himself to decide when government members should or should not appear to answer questions on policy. The party news management view is ob-

viously that a press release be printed and read an air, commentators say "Oh, how wonderful", and leave things at that.

GWYNNE POWER
Coventry

We're no fat cats

Sir: Before your readers are swept along by any superficial comparison between barristers and hospital consultants or other professionals ("Lord Chancellor attacks legal aid fat-cats", 10 December), they might bear in mind that hospital consultants, out of their £70,000, do not have to pay their support staff, do not have to rent and service the hospital buildings and equipment, do not have to market their services, do not have to buy and maintain efficient accounting systems to obtain payment, do not have to fund their own sickness insurance and pensions, and have some security of employment.

The fact that a number of very hard-working and exceptionally able barristers may obtain very high receipts in one calendar year does not alter these facts. I write as a barrister who gave up criminal work because the responsibility and anxiety involved were out of proportion to the general level of fees.

EDWARD CROSS
London WC1

Risks of life

Sir: Professor Margaret Brown (letter, 10 December) calls for wider debate about the mathematical skills we should be teaching our children to prepare them for citizenship in the next century.

A recent report prepared for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (*Children's Mathematical Understanding of Risk* by Michael Barnett and Richard Moss) has shown how children are ill prepared for con-

sidering the mathematics of risk, and how a richer mathematical curriculum which includes the study of probability might be exploited to educate children in the assessment of risk.

What a shame then, that the Government's drive for basic "numeracy" continues to displace ideas like probability from the primary mathematics curriculum in favour of basic numerical skills.

RoSPA recommends that risk assessment should be regarded as a life skill to help effective decision making to control risk in any context, whether it is eating a T-bone steak, having casual sex or crossing the road.

MARTIN GOMBERG
Education Adviser
The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
Birmingham

RICHARD NOSS
Professor of Mathematics Education
University of London

Invitation to burgle

Sir: You report on "the simple way to stop burglary" (8 December). However, local government has given the burglar the ability to target thousands of homes that people have to leave empty when out at work.

On the day refuse is collected, householders have to place a large wheeled bin on the pavement, and retrieve it after collection. We have to leave a large "please burgle me" sign on the pavement outside our homes until we return at the end of the working day.

The Government should make local authorities revert to the old system of the refuse collector bringing the bin out and returning it as part of the service.

I BROOKE
Pontefract, West Yorkshire

Paper garden

Sir: Should you recycle? (report, 6 December). Not always. As a company involved in composting green organic waste it is a question we take seriously. Large centralised sites composting in excess of 30,000 tonnes a year are questionable from an environmental perspective. Smaller schemes, bearing in mind the proximity principle and working in conjunction with farmers, almost always make environmental sense.

Recycling of paper and glass in theory should make sense, but in practice will depend on the variables. The best way to deal with poor-quality paper and thin card such as cereal boxes is to compost them in the garden. They are an excellent source of carbon and mixed in with grass cuttings will improve the carbon to nitrogen ratio, helping to provide a good compost.

CHARLIE TROUSDELL
KPS Composting Services
Kings Heath, West Sussex

Movable feast

Sir: I noticed with some astonishment this week that Sainsbury's are selling hot cross buns. Are they making the excellent point that Christmas is inseparable from Easter? Or does postmodernism mean that we now pick and mix the symbols for our festivals? Next year perhaps we could have Maypole dancing on August Bank Holiday, and two minutes silence on 4 July.

Dr NIGEL VAUX HALLIDAY
Liss, Hampshire

'What are these tidings when they're at home?' 'You are going to have a baby, Mary,' he said



MILES KINGDON

This is the season when we receive family newsletters from all round the world telling us what has happened to them in the last year, in remorselessly jolly detail. We may mock, but they do a good job as family bulletins. In fact, imagine how much easier the Christmas story would be to take in, if only the Virgin Mary had had the time to sit down and send everyone a special Christmas newsletter...

From Joseph and Mary and new baby Jesus. Hello, all, and what a year it's been! Probably the last time you heard from us was when we went off suddenly to Egypt but we're back again now and

dying to get back into the daily round. Egypt was one place we never thought we'd get to! I'm not saying it wasn't a nice change to be in Egypt - though we never did get to see the pyramids! - but going all that way with the baby and just a donkey, well, it isn't really my idea of fun. Still, if the alternative is to have your baby taken into so-called "care" by King Herod, what can you do?

I do seem to be rattling on a bit, don't I? (Incidentally, you may have deduced by now that "I" is Mary and not Joseph! Poor old Joseph has cut his hand in an accident in the carpentry shop and can't write.) It all started this time last year when Joseph and I

were just another engaged couple, as I suppose we still are. We were living with my mother's people in Nazareth and I was all alone at home one day, when there was a knock on the door and this enormous man came in. I was a bit scared but he seemed very nice, not a bit like the normal travelling salesman.

"Is the gentleman of the house in?" he said.

"No," I said. "He is round the back working on a pulpit for the Pharisees." I should say that Joseph has been doing very well with his woodwork this year even though now he is kept busy on new cribs for the baby!

"Fear not, for I have come to talk to you, O Mary, and I bring you good tidings."

"Get away!" I said, even though he spoke so posh, because you have to deal with these people sharply. "What are these tidings when they are at home?"

"You are going to have a baby, Mary," he said.

"Don't come near me!" I said, at which he smiled in a funny sort of way and said, "And it will be the son of God," and then he sort of vanished. Well, I told Joseph about this later, and we laughed and laughed about it, but then I was talking to my cousin Elizabeth (she has probably mentioned this in her

annual newsletter) and she had been approached by the same visitor who had told her that she was going to get pregnant too, and she did, even though she was miles too old to have a baby! So when I found I was going to have a baby, it all fitted together in a crazy sort of way, and anyway Joseph was too busy to be jealous because then we suddenly had to all go off to Bethlehem for this tax business, which I didn't understand myself however often Joseph explained it.

I wanted to stay with his folks while we were there but he said it would be difficult to explain to them why I was eight months pregnant and us

not married, and he would prefer it if we stayed in the inn. Of course, the inevitable happened and there was no room to have the baby in the stable, with all the horrible oxen and asses spreading their germs all over the place. I have never been so humiliated in my life (not till we had to leave at short notice for Egypt!) but things got a bit better when three charity workers or something like that called in with presents for the baby, and we were able to spend some gold on better quarters - but really!

He is a very good baby and has never cried once, which is a bit worrying, I suppose, but he smiles so nicely you can't

get cross with him. All sorts of people come to see him, so I suppose he really is special, but your own baby always is special anyway, so it makes no difference to me. He doesn't look a lot like Joseph, and I have no idea if he looks like God, but he is my baby and that is the main thing. He was already talking at six months, and the first thing he said was not "Mummy" or "Daddy", but "There are many rooms in my father's mansion", or something like that. Wasn't that odd? I wonder what it meant?

Anyway, see you all soon! Joseph says "Hello!" and Baby Jesus says "Blessed are the meek." Bye for now!

Geoffrey Robinson need not, and should not, resign



**DONALD
MACINTYRE
ON CURBING
TAX AVOIDANCE**

Have the Tories helped to save Geoffrey Robinson? The Opposition has defied the political folklore which says that by calling for a minister's resignation you make it much less likely that he will go. The more Peter Lilley and John Redwood, not to mention *The Daily Telegraph*, seek Mr Robinson's head on a charger, the less palatable would it be for Tony Blair to let him go, even if he wanted to. The stronger the pressure, the weaker it looks to yield to it.

This is nevertheless an episode that Blair could have done without. To have the complex financial affairs of the millionaire Paymaster General splashed across the front pages while you are cutting lone parents benefit, and your ministers are failing to make a very convincing case for doing so, is, on the face of it, about as nightmarish as things can get for a left-of-centre government.

Mr Robinson's colleagues have spent quite a lot of time over the past 24 hours explaining that he has become the subject of a press feeding frenzy. Certainly John Major damaged his government woefully by letting the Murdoch and Black press between them dictate what he did. But the Labour Party cannot escape all the blame for the frenzy; you can't, day after day in *Opposition*, fight to ensure that the private affairs of public figures are treated as a legitimate matter of public comment, and then complain when exactly the same happens when you are in government.

It has also been particularly unfortunate that Robinson, as the beneficiary of an offshore trust, is a Treasury minister, a big player in a department committed to doing something serious to reduce tax avoidance. If Robinson had been at - say - the Foreign Office, there might not have been such a fuss. It was unwise for the Treasury to put up Robinson, rather than Brown, to announce the Government's decision to transform the regime on tax-free savings. At the very least it is a serious embarrassment, rather as Harriet Harman's choice of a grammar school for her son was an embarrassment; it worries some arsy starwatts, infuriates others; and it exposes the leadership to the charge that it subscribes to the age-old parental principle of "Don't do as I do. Do as I say."

The question is whether it is more than that. Blair has so far taken the firm view that nothing has so far come to light which suggests that it is. The Prime Minister likes Robinson - which isn't surprising because most people who deal with him do. His weekend interviews demonstrate that he isn't exactly a masterful champion of his own cause. But he has a lot of charm.

Robinson is a good minister. Blair, as well as Brown, trusts his judgement on quite

a wide range of issues. He was extremely helpful in ensuring a smooth passage for the windfall tax among the utilities. (On the windfall tax he had been a hawk, arguing that the Government could have reasonably taken more out of their profits than they actually did.) John Prescott has welcomed his close co-operation in the Public Finance Initiative. Finally every Labour government - almost always underpowered in its knowledge of business - needs its millionaire businessman. Wilson's was Harold Lever. And every government, of whatever colour, would be the poorer without a brilliant buccaneer or two.

None of these, in themselves, are sufficient reasons for Robinson to stay. There are however, two rather better ones. The first is a paradox: Robinson's continued presence at the Treasury makes curbs on tax avoidance more, rather than less, likely. There is no reason for challenging his publicly expressed view over the weekend that he is personally arguing within the Treasury for further measures which might be to his personal detriment.

But second, even if he wasn't making the case himself, the current fuss has at least ensured that his mere presence is a guarantor of action. This doesn't mean that Gordon Brown isn't deadly serious about fulfilling his Green Budget pledge to tighten up on avoidance. There is no reason why one-off capital sums, as well as regular income, received by British citizens from offshore trusts shouldn't be taxed. But it won't be easy: the law is desperately complex and there are big vested interests to take on here.

To the scams in urgent need of abolition catalogued here yesterday by Polly Toynbee, I would add just one: widespread avoidance of inheritance tax by the rich. "Billions of pounds", said a Labour document before the election, "are held in trusts principally for tax avoidance". Just imagine the bedlam that would greet Brown on Budget Day next March, if Robinson at his side, he announced that the Government still had no firm plans to start recouping it.

The other is that whatever else Robinson has done, his financial dealings appear to have been irrelevant to his conduct as a minister. One of the reasons why the Opposition is on such weak ground is its own record of protecting politicians - such as Neil Hamilton and, for too long, Jonathan Aitken - whose private conduct was relevant to their political life. By contrast they have not yet been able to show that Robinson's financial affairs have affected his conduct as a minister.

There is an important caveat here. Robinson's explanation has so far been rather like the answer given by Norman Lamont when, more than a decade ago, in very different circumstances, he was pressed to account for his famous black eye: "complicated but innocent". If anything came to light which fatally undermined that, and therefore his fitness to be a minister, Blair has left himself just enough room to demand his resignation. Robinson would certainly have done better to disclose more from the first - about the date of the trust's formation and its subsequent share dealings - than he did when its existence first came to light. His original reticence is one of the reasons why the affair has damaged the image of a very image-conscious government. But on the known information, he has done nothing illegal as a private citizen and nothing improper as a minister. Unless that picture alters Blair is right to keep him.

Farmers should look to customers rather than politicians



**ANDREAS
WHITTAM
SMITH
FARMING THE
TAXPAYERS**

Should we feel sorry for the beef farmers? We would not sympathise with a pharmaceutical company if it put a faulty medicine on to the market; we would be angry. But in the topsy-turvy world of agriculture, it is the producers who are angry and the customers who are sorry.

In many moods I don't have much regard for the beef farmers. We subsidise them in more ways than we know. Whenever we go shopping and buy anything upon which VAT is levied, say, a CD player at Dixons, a part of the tax we have paid goes, via a European budget, into the pockets of farmers.

Then, when we visit the butcher's shop, we are paying, without realising it, prices that are far higher than they need be. There is a steep wall of high tariffs around the European beef market. Even in the protected North American market, beef prices are 20 per cent lower than they are here - as anybody who has been to a restaurant in the United States recently will have noticed. If there were free trade in beef, it wouldn't be highly priced Irish supplies that angry farmers would be throwing into the sea, it would be Australian beef, undercutting British prices by some 40 per cent or so.

I will grant that farmers' incomes are quite volatile. But if you look at the accounts of the nation's cattle and sheep farms, you find that last year an average farmer had a revenue of about £48,000 from a market that is rigged in the farmer's favour, and in addition received subsidies totalling £27,000 from taxpayers. From these receipts of £75,000, the livestock farmer had to meet costs of some £57,000, leaving £18,000 net farm income. If you go back 10 years, and adjust for inflation, you find that the long-term trend of farm incomes has been stable.

Let us be clear what this means for a group that speaks the language of dependency much more vociferously than any lone parent, or any out-of-work youngster or disabled



Looking to government: farmers deliver meat on the bone to Downing Street yesterday

Photograph: Rui Xavier

person. Unlike millions of other people, livestock farmers have work, have income, have amenities.

Yet listen to what they say. Sir David Naish, the chairman of the National Farmers Union, goes to speak to a group of farmers in the Midlands and feels that he must tell them a truth "which we cannot ignore". What is this revelation? "That consumers are all-powerful, and our future depends upon their willingness to buy what we produce". Surely, farming is the only business activity in the land where the people involved have to be reminded that they do in fact have customers.

"The Government are killing our industry," shouted a protesting farmer recently. No, it is the other way round. Given the risks to health which BSE poses, it is the farming industry which has been trying to kill us.

Broadly, the message from the farming community is: "whatever happens, you, the taxpayer, must look after us and keep us in business by one means or another". Sir David Naish even complains that farmers receive no reward for activities such as landscape management and environmental enhancement. Show me the enhancement. We are still losing hedgerows. And have not set-aside payments been a re-

ward for doing exactly nothing?

How the British coal-miners must wish they were as well treated as British farmers. When the pound sterling commands a high rate of exchange against other currencies, the farmers demand compensation and, sooner or later, they obtain it. When the same exchange rate has the effect of pricing British coal out of foreign markets, there is no help. The Government could distort the energy market to prevent natural gas from driving coal out of power stations, but it hardly lifts a finger. Coal-miners will go on losing their livelihoods. Yet governments continue to fix agricultural markets for the benefit of farmers.

Will they go on doing so? Beef farmers are entitled to have their doubts. Perhaps they are not, in the end, going to avoid the day of reckoning which shipbuilding workers, steel workers, and coal miners have confronted, long delayed though it has been. Beef consumption per head has been dropping since the early Eighties, long before the BSE crisis. A switch to convenience foods has reduced demand; health considerations have been a negative factor for many years; and poultry has become relatively much cheaper. Now the downward trend in demand is even steeper.

At the same time, the methods which European governments have used up to now to take surplus supply off the market may no longer be effective. New rules for export trading make it more difficult than it once was to subsidise exports to the Middle East and elsewhere. It is also becoming harder to maintain high tariff protection of the European market. Governments can put excess beef into cold storage and let a beef mountain build up again, but they are not enthusiastic about doing this at a time when public expenditure is tightly constrained. Calves could be slaughtered in great numbers to reduce the size of herds, but public opinion is likely to be hostile to such barbarity.

This is why European governments are beginning to wonder whether they should adopt a radically different policy. Instead of supporting beef prices in order to protect farmers' incomes, they would let prices drop by 35 per cent, or whatever is required to equate with

the world price, and pay compensation direct for the loss of income. But the British Government, for one, has said that it could not meet the whole bill. In other words, without a recovery in domestic demand, beef farmers are in real danger.

One way of seeing the threat is to consider what would be the consequences of a scenario in which agriculture was not a highly protected and subsidised activity. British dairy farmers would survive, and probably build up a good export trade in milk and milk products. The substantial amount of beef that comes from dairy herds would continue to be available. Large-scale cereal production would remain profitable.

What would disappear would be livestock-rearing in the hills, and the way of life that goes with it. Unfortunately indeed. But then, there is no more tin-mining in Cornwall, or shipbuilding in Birkenhead, or cotton-spinning in Bolton. Occupations was and wane. It is the natural order of things. Farmers should understand.

Decoding the enigma of the sudden emergence of the male torso



**LOUISE JURY
NAKED TRUTH**

He stands there on bus shelters and advertising hoardings, with his finely-toned pecs and his naked washboard stomach. Yves St Laurent man as the epitome of masculine beauty.

In the Diet Coke break advert, women crowd round the window for their morning fix of watching the hunky specimen of working labourer on the building site below.

John Mezzies newsagents report that *Street Boys*, its calendar of attractive boys, is out-selling its popular girlie title, *Girls, Girls, Girls*, by two to one. Simon Smith, of the calendar manufacturer Scandecor, reports that its *Power of Man* calendar of men in jeans and beachwear outsells any of its girlie rivals.

The naked male torso is everywhere. In the past, men's magazines had pictures of beau-

tiful women and women's magazines had pictures of beautiful men. No one had beautiful men. But when *The Face* and *Arena* imported an interest in style and clothes from gay culture into the Eighties mainstream, man as model finally began to make it into the limelight. Today, he is as likely to be decorating the hoardings as any of his female counterparts.

"I think there has been a dawning realisation that men's bodies can be sexy too," says Richard Myers, a creative director at Saatchi & Saatchi advertising agency.

The Nineties male, of course, is a fitter class of manhood than his Sixties or Seventies predecessor. The gym can be seen clearly etched across his chest. Even better, the muscles are the result of his mountain cycling or soccer-playing (not quite so narcissistic as sweating away on the weights).

So the office slob now faces the tyranny of comparison with Mr YSL and Messieurs January to December. That's a lot to live up to. There is some evidence up to. There is some evidence that men are feeling the pressure. Around one in 10 victims of anorexia and bulimia is male, according to the Eating Disorders Association. Just as women have faced images of stunning supermodels for generations, the new wave of glossy

magazines for men is engendering a similar kind of paranoia. "There is evidence that the more you are surrounded by pictures like that the more unhappy you are with yourself," says Dr Jill Welbourne, a specialist in eating disorders.

But, boys, worry not! Please don't take it seriously. Young women just want a giggle. Simon Smith said he certainly thought most women bought their calendars for their daughters or other women for a laugh. "It's done very tongue in cheek."

Mary-Ann Stephenson, of the Fawcett Society, the women's equality campaigners, says more widespread images of semi-clad men are one consequence of women's greater financial independence. "As women without children have more money today, they can spend it on what they want," she says. More advertisements are aimed at women because they are buying for themselves and not just for the household. Girl power has won women better jobs, more cash and a cheering array of beefcake for titillation.

But the prevalence of sexy male imagery is also a result of a freer society. "Women have become more upfront about their sexuality," she says. "It used to be said that women didn't like looking at men's bod-



ies because they're much more interested in their personalities. Perhaps women thought it was a bit shallow to say that women liked looking at nice men. There has been a change from that." In real life, women are not necessarily looking for men to be a provider. "In your fantasy world, perhaps you don't need a millionaire, you want a sexual object," she suggests.

Of course, not all these ads are aimed at women. Andy Medhurst, a media studies lecturer at Sussex University, points out it is much more acceptable these days even for straight men to express an interest in clothes and fashion and the body. The fascists of Italy and Germany in the 1930s made much of the cult

of the beautiful young male body, notes Dr Ruth Ben-Ghiat, a cultural historian at Fordham University in the US. "It's about the man as conqueror and it's about discipline. If you have a finely-toned body it's a sign that you're in control of yourself. Mussolini would strip off his shirt at every opportunity to show his muscles."

Such images are very extraordinary to women, she says, to the point of misogyny. Their preponderance today may even be an attempt to reassert male power. "There's been a lot of disappointment among males at the dawn of feminism and women in the workplace and women becoming fit themselves. Right now there are also a lot of ads that show women as being strong sporty figures - that must be very threatening for men."

Curiously, many women would rather see men fully dressed; though men raised on the promising allure of the long leg and the plunging neckline may find this hard to believe. Fiona McIntosh, editor of *Compass* magazine for twenty-something women, is currently sifting the candidates for its 50 most eligible bachelors awards. They are all being photographed with their clothes most definitely on. "Guys in underwear don't do anything for me," she says. "I'd much rather

see a guy in what he would wear normally, to show his sense of style."

Oliver James, author of *Britain on the Couch*, says if women really were buying pictures of naked men in calendars and magazines, this would be an intriguing shift. All attempts at selling women porn have failed, and the female sex has never before been turned on by isolated bits of bodies as men are. Could this be sign of a significant change?

"Over the next 50 years, we're going to find out whether given unconstrained free choice, women start behaving like men. Will they start shagging for the sake of a shag rather than for a relationship?"

Probably not. I think we may be misreading the signs. Much has been made of *The Full Monty*, the story of six jobless steelworkers who turn strippers. Its success has exceeded even that of *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. But the true pleasure of *The Full Monty* has nothing to do with the final striptease. It is a classic male bonding movie, an over-the-top-adversity-with-gritty-British-humour film. Its success has nothing to do with the attraction of men getting their kit off. I mean, they actually look rather silly at the end, don't they?



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FINANCIAL JOURNAL OF THE YEAR

Acer of Taiwan to create 1,000 jobs in Wales despite row over 'poaching' between regions

The Government yesterday attacked what it claimed were 'wild and unsubstantiated allegations' that Wales was engaged in turf wars with English regions to poach inward investment projects.

The outspoken comments, by Ron Davies, the Welsh Secretary, came as a Taiwanese computer giant announced plans to create 1,000 jobs near Cardiff. Chris Godsmark, Business Correspondent, reports

Acer, which claims to be the world's third-largest manufacturer of personal computers, has chosen a 20 hectare site on the M4 corridor east of Cardiff to build a factory making colour monitors.

The company said it would invest £25m at the plant over five years in two phases and would inject £5m of working capital. It would ultimately have capacity to make 2 million monitors a year. Work on the first stage in the project would start in January, with the first monitors rolling off production lines in August.

Acer had examined a location north of Newcastle, and a site near its existing operations in the Netherlands, but insisted the subsidy package on offer in Wales was not the main reason for choosing Cardiff. It pointed to the site's two-hour driving distance from Heathrow Airport and the fact that some of the UK's leading plastics suppliers were located in a 10-mile radius of nearby Newport.

Mr Davies said the project brought to an end "a great deal of unhelpful and inaccurate speculation about Acer's intentions and allegations that we have 'poached' the project from other parts of Britain".

However, both Mr Davies and the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) refused to reveal the level of state aid offered to Acer. The WDA is building the factory, which will be leased to Acer, reducing the cost and risk for the company. Other help includes work to create approach roads and spending on training for employees.

The row over subsidies exploded in

October when Sir George Russell, chairman of the Northern Development Company, publicly accused the Welsh Development Agency and the Welsh Office of poaching investment projects. Animosity intensified last year when Wales was picked over Tyneside by Lucky Goldstar of Korea for its £1.6bn investment programme.

Sir George, who could not be contacted yesterday, told the North East Chamber of Commerce that William Hague, the former Welsh Secretary, had "gazumped" ministerial colleagues and accused him of a "blatant disregard" of the rules.

Following the speech, some Tyneside MPs had joined the row, claiming the Welsh Development Agency had been able to gazump any aid package offered to Acer in the North-east.

It emerged last night that the Cardiff site should have been eligible for smaller grants than Tyneside because, according to the regional assistance rules, it was considered to be in a less deprived area. Unlike the Tyneside site, the Welsh location does not qualify for the highest level of regional assistance grants.

Though he did not name Sir George, Mr Davies yesterday said he was glad the project had not been damaged by "wild and unsubstantiated allegations by some organisations and individuals". Rhodri Morgan, MP for Cardiff West, went further, accusing Sir George of acting in an "aggressive and unprofessional manner".

The Welsh Development Agency added that it had received complaints from several companies which had already invested in Wales about the arguments, which were damaging the UK's prospects for attracting future funds.

Margaret Beckett, President of the Board of Trade, has attempted to end the gazumping row by suggesting the Department of Trade and Industry should act as a clearing house for all inward investment projects. The issue is still being discussed by ministers.

Meanwhile, Honda unveiled plans to invest a further £60m at its Swindon plant in preparation for a new version of the Civic model and the replacement next year for the Accord saloon range. The cash, which brings to £460m the amount invested so far, would create 400 new jobs, taking the total workforce to 3,000.

Inward investment - How the regions have fared



Ron Davies

WEST MIDLANDS			
FIRM	COUNTRY	MONEY	JOBS
Jaguar	USA	£370m	6,000

WALES			
FIRM	COUNTRY	MONEY	JOBS
LG	Korea	£1.7bn	6,100

SOUTH WEST			
FIRM	COUNTRY	MONEY	JOBS
Honda	Japan	£460m	3,000

Source: DTI/Honda

SCOTLAND			
FIRM	COUNTRY	MONEY	JOBS
Hyundai	Korea	£2.4bn	2,000
NEC	Japan	£530m	2,000
Chungwha	Taiwan	£250m	3,300

NORTH EAST			
FIRM	COUNTRY	MONEY	JOBS
Siemens	Germany	£1.1bn	1,800
Fujitsu	Japan	£1.2bn	1,600
Samsung	Korea	£450m	3,200

EAST MIDLANDS			
FRM	COUNTRY	MONEY	JOBS
UPS	USA	£784m	N/A
Toyota	Japan	£700m	1,000



Margaret Beckett

MFI revamp leaves up to 1,000 jobs at risk

MFI Furniture, the kitchens and bedrooms group, is to cut several hundred jobs over the next 18 months in an attempt to improve efficiency. The company plans to close the in-store warehouses at its 180 branches and replace them with 12 larger warehouses which will deliver goods directly to customer's homes.

Up to 1,000 jobs are at risk at the in-store warehouses, though MFI said many staff would be re-deployed at the new home delivery centres. Some jobs at the group's head office in Colindale, north London, have already gone and more may be cut.

MFI is making the changes to reduce costs and make its delivery system more efficient. It will sub-let the in-store warehouses space to other retailers.

The new efficiency programme will also see all MFI stores converted to its MFI Home works format by mid-1998. These include a broader range of household goods such as kitchenware and textiles. Some 15 per cent of product lines will be stripped out with ranges such as upholstery and cheaper cabinet furniture are under review. Instead the stores will focus more on higher margins kitchens and bedrooms which it manufactures itself.

John Randall, chief executive, said: "The business is going through a process of major change and we aim to improve retail profits and focus on areas of potential growth."

He was speaking as MFI announced an 8 per cent increase in first-half pre-tax profits to £35.4m. The company said it had only experienced a windfall factor boost to sales in the North-east of England, following the flotation of Northern Rock earlier this year. But it said customers were trading up to more expensive kitchens. Its average kitchen sale is now over £2,000, excluding fitting costs.

First-half figures were affected by the £3.5m costs associated with closing its German operations this year and increased losses in France due to the weak economy. The company said the key to its full year would be the 10 weeks following Christmas.

— Nigel Cope

Investment column, page 20

Treasury claims summit breakthrough on coal as generators agree new deal

The Treasury last night claimed to have achieved a breakthrough in the coal crisis by persuading the power generators to bring forward delivery of coal stocks next year. But as Chris Godsmark explains, the Treasury's attempt to broker a solution to the coal crisis has privately met with scepticism from the generating groups.

Geoffrey Robinson, the embattled Paymaster General, held talks lasting four hours with Richard Budge, chief executive of RJB and the heads of the three big coal fired generators. Keith Henry from National Power, Ed Wallis from PowerGen and John Devaney from Eastern Group.

The generators had hoped to hear details of the Government's plans for a three month stay of execution for looming pit closures, which could involve up to 5,000 job losses. The proposals, revealed by Tony Blair, the Prime Minister, last week, would involve the generators building up bigger stockpiles of coal after existing long term supply contracts with RJB expire at the end of March.

A Treasury statement last night said National Power and Eastern Group, which have already signed new contracts to buy around half their current order from RJB, had

agreed to "accelerate deliveries" of coal between April and June.

The statement added: "Arrangements for coal deliveries up to the end of June 1998 have been agreed. This gives the Government the opportunity to carry out the wider ranging reviews on Energy policy it has put in hand."

Officials said National Power would bring forward delivery of 350,000 tonnes between April and June. This represents a limited concession compared with a total order of 8 million tonnes. Eastern would accelerate delivery of 250,000 tonnes, compared with contracts to buy 4 million tonnes a year. National Power confirmed it had agreed to "facilitate" the deal.

PowerGen, which has yet to conclude negotiations with RJB, had agreed to buy at least 1.1 million tonnes from the coal producer. Mr Wallis, PowerGen chief executive, had previously warned he could buy all his coal from abroad. The Treasury said the new deal would be "at a price acceptable to both parties."

Another element to the agreement involves RJB extending redundancy terms to workers from April to June which offer more generous compensation packages. The current redundancy deal, agreed at privatisation, expires with the coal contracts at the end of March.

The Treasury said RJB would "use this period to continue to reduce operating costs and to improve their competitiveness. Any increase in pithead stocks in the April to June period will be financed by RJB."

John Redwood, the shadow industry secretary, yesterday accused Mr Robinson of "bungling" by intervening in coal contracts which should have been left to the private sector to sort out.

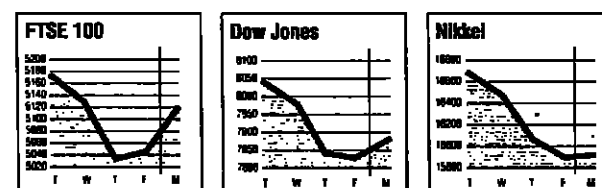
He continued: "Miners will not be grateful for a very temporary stay of execution which serves only to delay and cut their redundancy money." Mr Redwood said the Treasury should stop interfering and leave energy policy to the energy minister, John Birt. "Geoffrey Robinson should stand aside," he said.

An RJB spokesman said last night that it was unlikely to press ahead with pit closures until the three month deal ended next summer. By then the group, which bought British Coal's English pits on privatisation three years ago, hopes to have gained contracts to supply coal to Spain and Germany. The government has been lobbying to persuade other European countries to buy UK produced coal.



Geoffrey Robinson: Deal brokered after four hours of talks

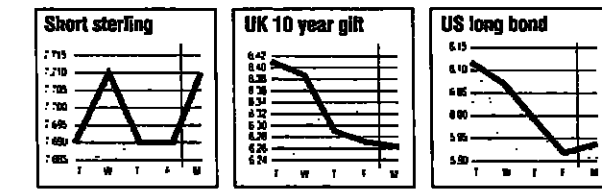
STOCK MARKETS



*Dow Jones index and graph in 5pm

Index	Close	Change	Change(%)	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield(%)
FTSE 100	5121.80	76.60	1.52	5367.30	3933.90	3.44
FTSE 250	4783.00	5.10	0.11	4963.80	4347.30	3.48
FTSE 350	2482.00	30.30	1.25	2570.50	1858.10	3.45
FTSE All Share	2203.11	27.85	1.16	2307.68	1948.45	3.45
FTSE SmallCap	2239.50	-0.70	-0.03	2407.40	2127.50	3.46
FTSE Fledgling	1253.90	0.90	0.07	1346.50	1203.20	3.42
FTSE AIM	974.20	-0.80	-0.08	1138.00	965.90	1.11
Dow Jones	7885.05	38.54	0.49	8299.03	6236.05	1.73
Nikkei	15939.39	5.09	0.03	20910.79	14966.13	0.97
Hong Kong	10435.15	-179.51	-1.69	10820.51	8776.98	4.07
Hang Seng	4060.04	-22.56	-0.55	4458.88	2797.54	2.00

INTEREST RATES

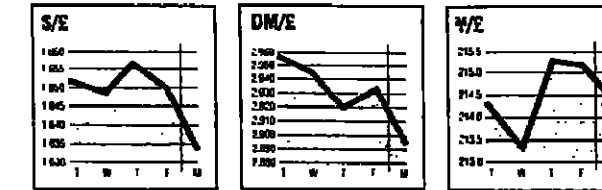


Money Market Rates	2 months	3 months	6 months	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year
UK	7.72	1.33	7.76	0.87	6.26	-1.35	6.20	-1.97	
US	5.91	0.36	5.97	0.21	5.74	-0.63	5.94	-0.69	
Japan	0.76	0.31	0.71	0.14	1.89	-0.76	2.53	-0.74	
Germany	3.75	0.51	4.04	0.74	5.28	-0.58	5.85	-0.90	

MAIN PRICE CHANGES

Rises	Falls
Coals Virella	Danica Bus Sys
Sears	BTP
Barton	Christies Int
Barclays	Rank Grp

CURRENCIES



Pound	Dollar	Yen
Dollar	1.6341	1.6637
D-Mark	2.8945	2.5774
Yen	214.47	189.83
£ index	103.70	93.20
\$ index	108.30	98.10

OTHER INDICATORS

at 5pm	Close	Chg	Tr. Apr	Index	Chg	Tr. Apr	Next Apr
Shanghai (\$)	16.84	0.07	23.13	GDP	113.90	3.80	109.70
Gold (\$)	285.55	2.60	368.25	RPI	159.60	3.70	153.91
Silver (\$)	5.96	0.18	4.83	Base Rates	7.25	6.00	

www.bloomberg.com

source: Bloomberg

SBC Warburg confirms bidding for Christie's

SBC Warburg Dillon Read, the merchant bank, yesterday confirmed it had approached Christie's about making a bid for the auction house on behalf of a group of anonymous private investors. As Peter Thal Larsen reports, the move would give Christie's the financial muscle offer guarantees to its customers.

SBC Warburg met Christie's advisers for the first time yesterday, after Christie's board decided on Sunday evening to proceed with the talks.

The bank is believed to have tabled a tentative offer of 300p a share, valuing Christie's at about £500m. However, this is understood to be an initial offer which may be subsequently raised. Christie's shares, which had risen sharply last week, fell 12p to 288p.

However, SBC Warburg last night emphasised that it was acting on behalf of a consortium of private investors rather than itself. Observers had earlier speculated that the bank might be considering a strategic move into the auction house business.

SBC Warburg said it would only proceed with the offer if it had the backing of Christie's board and had completed the necessary due diligence. The identity of the private investors will remain a secret until a final offer is agreed.

The bank is also believed to have guaranteed to retain Christie's existing management and the structure of its board if it consents to a bid.

Last night, Christie's appointed Merrill Lynch, the investment bank, as its joint stockbroker. Until yesterday, SBC Warburg had acted as sole broker to Christie's, but its involvement in the bid raised a potential conflict of interest. Merrill Lynch will work alongside Hambros, Christie's existing adviser.

A week ago, Christie's revealed that it had received a bid approach which it had rejected as too low. Two days later, however, the company said it was considering a modified offer. SBC Warburg is understood to have made both offers. No other bidders are believed to be involved.

If successful, the bid will give Christie's the financial clout to win new business by offering financial guarantees to its clients. Customers are increasingly demanding that auction houses underwrite the proceeds of the auction.

Until recently, however, auction houses have lacked the financial muscle to offer those guarantees. Christie's main rival Sotheby's recently suffered a major loss when an auction it had agreed to underwrite failed to raise the necessary amount.

The success of the offer depends heavily on the support of Joe Lewis, the Bahamas-based British billionaire who owns 29.6 per cent of Christie's. He is understood to have agreed to swap his stake for equity in the new company. He will also help to underwrite auctions by putting up some of the necessary risk capital.

Bass sells bingo business for £279m

Bass continued the process of slimming down its main hotel and brewing operations yesterday when it sold Gala, the bingo business, to a management buy-in team for £279m in cash. The move ends months of speculation about the future of the 130 bingo halls, while raising investors' expectations that Bass is about to launch a large acquisition or share buy-back.

Analysts said the price tag, which includes £43m of cash balances in Gala, was slightly disappointing. "If they had made up their mind to sell last year they could have got more for it," said one. Like the rest of the bingo industry, Gala's profits have come under pressure from the National Lottery. In the year to last September Gala made operating profits of £24m. Bass shares fell 8p to 895p.

The deal will almost halve Bass's net borrowings, which stood at £500m at the end of September. Analysts calculate that the group can now afford to spend more than £2bn on acquisitions or returning cash to shareholders.

Bass refused to be drawn on how it would use the cash. But industry observers believe that the group would prefer to make acquisitions. "Bass' management are fairly sure they can spend the money more wisely than their shareholders can," one commented. However, he added that if the group had not identified a suitable target by the end of 1998 it would come under pressure to return the cash to shareholders.

— Peter Thal Larsen

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY SAMEENA AHMAD

MFI misses out on retail boom

It has been a tough year for MFI Furniture. In a period characterised by windfall payments, rising house prices and a revival of consumer confidence, the kitchen and bedrooms group has conspicuously failed to capitalise on the benign trading conditions. MFI shares have underperformed the market by 41 per cent this year and the fear among the group's critics is that if it cannot cash-in during sunny times like these, it will find it much harder next year as higher interest rates start to hit the high street.

To be fair to the management, there have been specific reasons behind MFI's underperformance. One is the closure of the German operations last year which cost £3.5m. The other is France, where the poor economic climate meant the division lost almost £3m in the half.

Given all that, the 8 per cent increase in half-year pre-tax profits to £35.4m is reasonable and the 8 per cent rise in first-half sales is encouraging. In truth, MFI is in something of a transition phase and there is a new determination among the management to make more of the assets at their disposal.

The plan is to squeeze more value from the integration between manufacturing and retailing, improve the sales mix towards higher margin, higher ticket items such as kitchens and bedrooms, while shaving back the cost base. This will mean job cuts as the group closes the in-store warehouses at 186 branches and replaces them with 12 "super-warehouses".

In the stores, up to 15 per cent of product lines will be stripped out, with ranges such as upholstery and cheaper cabinet furniture under review. The question is whether MFI is shifting towards higher ticket items at the wrong stage in the cycle and whether the reduction in product lines will reduce sales.

The key to MFI's year will be the 10 weeks after Christmas, which accounts for a third of group's sales. Assuming full-year profits of £85m-£90m

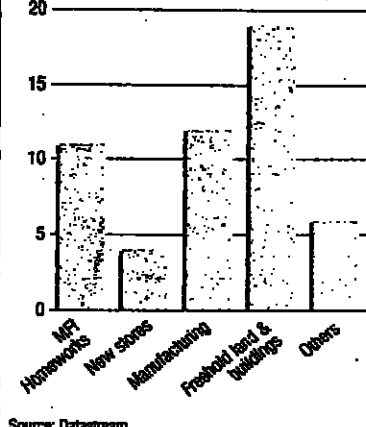
MFI Furniture: At a glance

Market value: £741m, share price 125p (+3.5p)

Trading record	1995	1996	1997	96/97	97/98
Turnover (£m)	720.7	766.2	845.6	440.5	475.5
Pre-tax profits (£m)	66.1	58.1	70.3	32.7	35.4
Earnings per share (p)	7.63	8.43	8.68	3.85	4.24
Dividends per share (p)	4.25	4.4	4.8	1.7	1.8

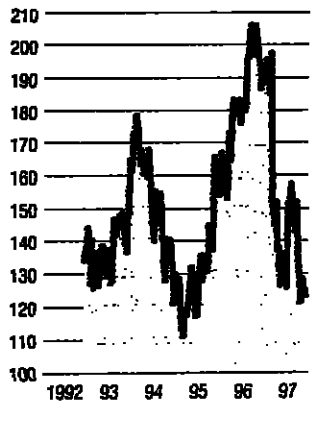
Capital Expenditure

1997/98 (6 months), £m



Share price

pence



the shares - up 3.5p to 125p - trade on a forward rating of 11. A discount to the sector but not one to chase just now.

Bio-tech shares out in the cold

Biotechnology shares? - you just can't give 'em away. Yesterday's crop of results was a sharp reminder of how bad things can get in the UK's unloved biotech sector where disappointing news from heavyweights like Scotia and British Bio has left shares almost 50 per cent off their yearly highs.

Take ML Laboratories. Shares in this controversial group hit the top at almost 470p early last year, before taking a long slide. Full-year results yesterday left the price at 111.5p, down another 23.5p. Then there's the dis-

trous Aromascan. Technical hitches with this group's electronic nose have left its shares at a 30p low, down from 182p at the start of last year. Then there's Cambridge Antibody Technology. This very promising biotech - albeit with a very young drug pipeline - which floated at 500p in March, finished yesterday 5p ahead at 375p after decent full-year results, but close to their 350p all-time low.

That said, ML's fortunes are looking better. The group's tie-up with Baxter to sell local ML's kidney dialysis fluid, should start to bring in a steady royalty stream next year as Baxter will have its first full-year of sales in 16 European countries. With 80 per cent of the dialysis fluid market and Baxter pretty positive about local, the income looks of reasonable quality.

ML's dry powder inhaler licenced to Medeva is being rolled out across Europe, which should mean more royal-

ties, and there is certainly an eager market for a good inhaler technology if that is what ML has. Other areas like Aids and cancer look more iffy. If the sector cheers up, as it might in 1998, ML could benefit. Wait for sentiment to improve.

World Telecom heads overseas

A company called World Telecom may sound like some huge American operator, with millions of subscribers and billions of profits. In fact, it's an AIM-quoted tiddler which only joined the market in March and is valued at just £57m. The group is just four years old, turned over a meagre £4m last year, and has yet to make a profit.

However, the name says something about the scale of World Telecom's ambitions. It sells prepaid phonecards and telephone chargecards which offer hefty discounts to the rates charged by established operators like BT. Customers include Arthur Andersen and - amazingly - BT, which issues the cards to executives to cut telephone bills when they're travelling. World Telecom also produces cards for the likes of NatWest who stick their own names on the cards.

This may seem like a low-margin business. But, crucially, World Telecom also has the technology to handle the calls made with its cards. This allows it to route calls to the cheapest lines available - making a healthy mark-up - and offer extras like voicemail and comprehensive billing. Overseas markets beckon. Yesterday, World Telecom announced plans to invest £1.1m on a similar service in Spain. Germany, Italy and France will follow shortly.

All this should mean explosive growth: house broker Collins Stewart forecasts sales of £30m in 1998, with pre-tax profits of £1m after a £2.5m loss in 1997. The risk, though, is that World Telecom is squeezed as larger players muscle into its market. The group says it is nimbler than the opposition and able to stay ahead. But investors will have to see some hard numbers before pushing the shares - unchanged yesterday at 162.5p - any higher.

Sears sells Shoe Express stores at £33m loss

Philip Green, the retail entrepreneur, has taken a further step in the development of his mini-high street empire with the purchase of the Shoe Express stores from Sears. Sears will book a £33m loss on the deal but Mr Green is confident he can turn the loss-making stores around. Nigel Cope, City Correspondent, reports.



Philip Green said the purchase of Shoe Express stores would speed up the expansion of his Mark One chain

Mr Green is buying 185 of the Shoe Express branches though it is not clear if he will retain the trading name or continue to run them as shoe shops. Between 75 and 100 of the stores will be converted to Mr Green's Mark One format which specialises in discounted women's fashion. A study will be undertaken to decide the best use of the remaining outlets.

The deal means Mr Green, a former chairman of the What Everyone Wants clothing chain, now controls Shoe Express, Mark One, five branches of the Owen Owen department stores and a stake of about 15 per cent in Sports Division, the sports group which acquired Olympus Sports from Sears. Sports Division is due to float on the stock market next spring. Asked about his burgeoning retail empire Mr Green, said: "It's progressing nicely."

Mr Green has also been tipped as a possible buyer of Shoe City, Sears' loss-making out-of-town shoe superstores. "Anything's possible," Mr Green said yesterday.

However, he said there were no plans to integrate the disparate interests into a single group. Each will retain separate management. Mr Green said: "The entrepreneurial element is in acquiring the business and

knowing what to do with it when you've got it." He said the deal represented a short cut in his plans to expand Mark One. "To open 70 to 100 stores is two to three years work."

Alnery, a company controlled by Mr Green, is paying Sears £8.5m for £32.5m of assets. It will also manage the 136 remaining Shoe Express branches, which will be closed by Sears by the end of January. This will give rise to the loss of around 500 jobs.

The total cost to Sears of the disposal will be around £65m, slightly less than expected. Shoe

Express made losses of between £17m and £18m in the last year on sales of around £165m.

Shoe Express has been a disaster for Sears' management. The cheap, self-service format was derived from a successful US equivalent and hailed as a potential saviour of the group's footwear operations. Founded in 1992, Sears spent millions on store conversions and promotions but it failed to take off.

The sale means Sears has only Shoe City and Cable & Co. left to sell of its British Shoe Corporation subsidiary. Sears shares closed 2.5p up at 49.5p.

Diageo to start trading tomorrow after US clears deal

The £24bn mega-merger of Guinness and Grand Metropolitan cleared its final hurdle yesterday with the approval of US competition authorities. The condition is that Diageo must sell its Dewar's Scotch whisky brand and Bombay gin. Nigel Cope, City Correspondent, reports.

The deal's clearance by United States Federal Trade Commission means that shares in both Guinness and Grand Metropolitan will cease trading at today's close. Following the approval of the High Court which also came yesterday, shares in Diageo, the newly merged entity, will start trading on Wednesday. Diageo has six months to sell the Dewar's and Bombay Sapphire and Bombay gin brands in what is considered to be the

largest ever divestment ordered by the FTC. Each brand will be sold to a single purchaser with Credit Suisse First Boston, the investment bank, appointed to handle both deals.

A queue of buyers is expected for Dewar's, which is the market leading scotch whisky in the US. It sold 2.7 million cases worldwide last year including 1.5m of the 9m cases sold in America. Likely buyers are expected to include Allied

Domecq, Seagram and Baccardi-Martini. The price is expected to be around £600m-£700m. The sale of Dewar's was expected to be a condition of the merger's clearance as Guinness and Grand Met also control J&B and Johnnie Walker, America's second and third-ranked brands. The FTC's decision mirrors that of the European competition authorities which told Guinness in October that it would have to give

up the brand in Europe. Allied Domecq repeated its interest yesterday: "It's a brand that would be of interest to us but not at any price."

The Bombay Gin brands, which have been one of the fastest growing parts of Grand Met's drinks portfolio will fetch £50m-£100m. The brands sold 600,000 cases worldwide last year, just over half of which were in the US. Diageo already controls Gordon's and Gilbey's gin

as well as Tanqueray, America's leading premium imported gin. George Bull and Tony Greener, chairmen of Grand Met and Guinness respectively, said they regretted the sale of the two brands but pointed out that it was an achievement to take the deal to fruition just seven months and five days since it was announced.

Diageo will rank as Britain's eighth largest company and the world's largest spirits group.

US sees surge in industrial output for November

The turbo-charged American economy saw a surge in industrial production last month. Official figures showed output up 0.8 per cent in November, keeping the year-on-year growth at a two-year high of 5.6 per cent. The gains were spread over a wide range of industries. The rate of capacity use in industry rose to 83.2 per cent from 82.9 per cent in October. Although the Federal Reserve is known to monitor these figures closely, analysts said the news did not make an increase in interest rates more likely. The Federal Open Market Committee, meeting today, is expected to leave rates unchanged because of the financial turmoil in Asia. However, if the economy keeps up its pace, fears of higher borrowing costs will return to the financial markets in the new year.

Sedgwick denies Aon bid

Sedgwick Group has been forced to issue a denial of a £1bn bid from giant US insurance broker Aon. Shares in the group rocketed after weekend press reports suggested a bid was in the offing. Despite the denial, shares stayed at a high of 151p, valuing the group at £811m, against a year low of 115p. In a statement, the group said: "Sedgwick confirms that no discussions with Aon have taken place during the past 12 months or are currently taking place. However, analysts remain convinced that a bid for Sedgwick, which owns the UK's largest financial advice practice, is in the offing in the context of widespread consolidation in the insurance broking sector. The Sedgwick Group is now being linked with Aon's cash-rich US rival, Marsh & McLennan."

Whitbread to sell 62 pubs

Whitbread, the brewer and pub company, said it would sell 62 leased pubs to Avelbury Taverns for an undisclosed sum. The sale of the pubs, which are in the North of England, follows Whitbread's sale, in September, of 94 pubs in the South of England to Enterprise Inns Plc for £9.4m. "The sale is part of a review of our estate which we undertake from time to time in a rapidly changing market place," said Ray Parker, property director of Whitbread's leased pub division.

ACCA warning over wages

Companies across the UK are completely unprepared for the introduction of a national minimum wage, according to a survey by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA). Many thought the minimum wage could lead to increased inflation, greater unemployment and damage competitiveness.

Newmall bids for Wellman

Newmall, a company set up by venture capital business Alchemy, is offering 50p per share in an agreed bid for Wellman, the maker of industrial furnaces and ovens. Newmall said the offer valued Wellman at around £73m. Wellman said it considered the offer "the best option for shareholders". It said the offer represents a premium of 77 per cent to the closing price of Wellman share of 28.25p on 31 October.

BICC unit wins £100m deals

BICC Group, the cables and electrical equipment group, has confirmed that its unit BICC Communications has won two partnering contracts, together worth around £100m over the next three years. BICC said its unit has agreed to supply optical and metallic cable services for telecommunication and cable television networks on an exclusive basis for three years. The company also said the unit also won a contract to supply ESAT Telecom of Ireland.

Psion signs deal with Dell to supply modem cards

Psion, the hand-held computer company, has signed an agreement to supply US giant Dell Computer with the next generation of hi-tech computer modem cards world-wide.

Responding to questions about trading ahead of the crucial Christmas period, the company said that sales of its new range of Series 5 hand-held computers were "very strong".

Psion Dacom, a wholly owned subsidiary of Psion, will supply Dell, the world's largest direct seller of personal computers, with 56K, high-speed PC cards. Psion believes the deal will add between £15m and £20m to Dacom's revenues, which themselves are around a fifth of the group's total sales.

However, it admitted that with price competition on PC cards "cut-throat", particularly in the direct sales market,

margins on the agreement are unlikely to be very large. However, the deal will boost Psion's presence in the US, where it has struggled to establish itself and where Dell is establishing a growing presence. The two companies already have supply agreements in Europe. Psion's shares rose 17.5p to 451p.

Psion says its 56K cards, which are the size of a credit card and replace desktop modems, are the fastest modems that can be used along normal telephone lines. The cards are reprogrammable and can be upgraded to use with digital GSM mobile-phone systems and ISDN lines.

In contrast to several retailers like Comet, which have found pre-Christmas sales sluggish, Psion said it was confident about sales of the Series 5.

- Sameena Ahmad

Westminster trust plan may spark boom in sector

Westminster Healthcare's decision to set up a property investment trust could be the start of a boom in sale and leaseback in the UK nursing home sector. Sameena Ahmad looks at nursing home tiddler Tamaris, a rare champion of sale and leaseback deals in Britain who's example persuaded Westminster to make its move.

shareholders sweet enough to support their huge cash needs. But when local governments controlled the coffers, funding for care home beds dried up and so did both the operator's profits and the City's goodwill. Tamaris was different, growing profitably and fast.

Back in 1994 it had 234 care home beds. By 1996 that had grown to 906 beds. In March this year the number had more than doubled to 2,000. The deal announced yesterday - where Tamaris is buying 12 Westminster homes and leasing five back through Atlantic Healthcare, Westminster's joint venture investment company, has helped to more than double Tamaris' size again.

Barbara-Ann Maxwell, Tamaris' chief executive, explains the advantages of S&L. "We don't see ourselves as property specialists. We are operators, that's our strength." She points out that with interest rates rising and nursing home companies now forced to depreciate assets, the terms of S&L are easily as good as borrowing from banks.

"Not only do we believe we get as good a deal as we could get from the banks, but we have control over our costs," she explained.

"That is important in this business. There is a finite potential operating profit per home and so cost control becomes vital."

That Westminster Health Care, the UK's second biggest nursing home group, capitalised at more than £250m turned to Tamaris, a tiddler valued at £15m, to kick-start its newly created property investment trust says a lot about the potential of sale and leaseback (S&L) financing in the UK.

Compared to the US, where almost every nursing home company is funded through S&L, Tamaris is the only UK company to have extensively used the arrangement to finance growth.

The majority of nursing home groups here have chosen to own and manage their own homes. That was fine when nursing home companies, funded by central government, were growing profits and could keep

COMPANY RESULTS	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
Amersham (Q)	0.491m (1.35m)	-1.07m (1.007m)	-3.97p (4.06p)	-
Arrol Midland (Q)	17.57m (6.60m)	-0.90m (2.98m)	-2.6p (2.88p)	-
Barratons Inns (Q)	91.31m (85.47m)	6.00m (6.061m)	4.65p (2.81p)	2.05p (2.05p)
Cambridge Antibody (Q)	1.1m (2.1m)	-4.4m (3.3m)	-41.3p (32.3p)	-
Channel Holdings (Q)	30.13m (29.2m)	1.77m (1.28m)	1.3p (1.0p)	0.55p (0.55p)
Finchale Pharmacy (Q)	21.8m (18.8m)	0.935m (0.723m)	7.3p (7.1p)	2.75p
General Casualty Syndicate (Q)	13.25m (6.17m)	-1.29m (0.824m)	-1.29p (4.15p)	nil
Hamphill (Q)	14.30m (15.23m)	0.933m (0.953m)	8.6p (8.6p)	2.25p (2.25p)
Harley & Hanson (Q)	35.72m (34.49m)	8.48m (8.27m)	23.97p (21.97p)	11.4p (10.6p)
MFI Furniture (Q)	475.5m (440.5m)	35.4m (22.7m)	4.24p (3.85p)	1.8p (1.7p)
ML Laboratories (Q)	6.5m (10.4m)	1.1m (5.5m)	0.5p (3.8p)	-
Pharmalink (Q)	1.85m (2.15m)	-1.74m (3.15m)	-3.6p (6.7p)	-
Plym (Q)	71.1m (67.1m)	3.9m (3.65m)	5.6p (4.9p)	2.2p (2.0p)
Stockbourne (Q)	0.800m (1.28m)	-0.07m (4.45m)	-0.07p (4.45p)	nil

(Q) - Final (I) - Interim * comparative figures pre-tax

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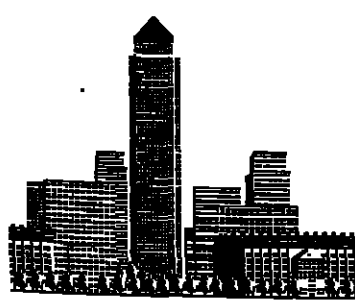
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OUTLOOK

A new hole for Geoffrey Robinson

If there was a motto pinned above Geoffrey Robinson's desk it would read "When in a hole, stop digging" since the more the Paymaster General tries to explain away his offshore trusts the deeper into the mire he seems to get. Yesterday, however, he put his personal travails to one side to help excavate his Government from a different sort of hole. This particular one is black and has been created by someone else who knows a lot about digging, Richard Budge of RJB Mining.

The idea that the Paymaster General can reverse the long-term decline of the coal industry by inviting Mr Budge into his office along with the chief executives of the three big generators and banging a few heads belongs in fantasy land.

But it is what passes these days for Labour's energy policy. Until the Department of Trade and Industry decides what to do with all those applications for gas-fired stations, the bulge in the pipeline will get bigger and we will have policy on the hoof.

From a very New Labour attitude of benign neglect a matter of weeks ago the Government now believes it has an historic role to play as defender of the coal industry and saviour of miners' jobs, certainly at least this side of Christmas.

Quite why a member of the Treasury team has been selected for this task when the Government already has an energy minister and keeps insisting there is no question of throwing money at the pits is a minor mystery. But it probably has something to do with Mr Robinson's "can

do" image as a businessman first and a politician second.

This is hardly the first time New Labour has displayed its quaint but naive faith in the ways of the business world. It has already been beguiled on several occasions. Need to lend some respectability to the welfare to work programme? Then get the man from the Pru to call. Need to bring some intellectual rigour to the tax and benefit review? Then bring on Martin "two brains" Taylor from Barclays Bank.

As Mr Robinson has demonstrated, however, businessmen are mere mortals too. The offshore trusts affair is certainly an embarrassment but thus far it is hard to pin much more on the Paymaster General than a charge of hypocrisy. Squirrelling millions away from the taxpayer while penalising those whose savings exceed £50,000 is poor politics. There again, propping up the pits while denying launch aid for Airbus (another Robinson decision) looks like poor business.

The lesson is that businessmen and politicians do not always mix, even for those invited into Labour's gilded inner circle. It will take a few more embarrassing episodes to drive home the message. Mr Taylor could provide the next one if he decides to buy NatWest and take several thousand bank workers out of the tax system and on to unemployment benefits.

At last, a useful corrective to the fashion for predicting that Asia's financial meltdown spells doom for the rest of the world.

It spells, if not doom then possibly recession for Asia, say the cool heads at the OECD. For the rest, the crisis comes as a rather useful counterweight to the danger of overheating. Certainly, the sharp slowdown in South-east Asia will slow exports from the rest of the world and worsen the European and US trade position. But there need be next to no impact on growth and inflation as long as central banks adjust interest rates appropriately.

Does this rather contrarian view in the semi-annual Economic Outlook make sense? On the evidence so far, yes. The Federal Reserve has already held off raising US interest rates when many analysts expected an increase, and it is likely to leave rates unchanged when it meets again today. As indicator after indicator of domestic inflationary pressure starts to flash red, this can only be a reaction to the potential spillover from Asia.

There is also a growing sentiment that the Bank of England will not increase UK rates any further – a view shared by the OECD, which sees Britain coming in for a soft landing. The Bank's Monetary Policy Committee appears to be waiting for firmer evidence on the export front, which is where the first symptoms of "Asian flu" afflicting the British economy would manifest themselves.

The view that collateral damage on the rest of the world would be limited got several further boost yesterday from within Asia. Korea said it would allow its currency to float, which traders said

would get the pain of devaluation over quickly and allow the won to stabilise, rather than dragging out the decline over several more weeks or months. A package of tax-cuts started to take shape in Japan, with details due today. Even Mahathir Mohamad, the motormouth Malaysian Prime Minister, admitted that the Asian countries had made some economic policy mistakes.

He, and other Asean leaders, still criticised the West for not doing enough to help sort out the crisis. No thanks there for the near-\$100bn in emergency credit arranged for South-east Asia in the space of five months. But the assorted grumblers ought to be even more grateful that the Fed and other central banks are not maniacs for financial orthodoxy at all costs, as they are so often portrayed.

This is not to say that there is no danger of the financial meltdown worsening, getting beyond the control of the central bank firefighters. Of course catastrophe is possible. It is just not the most probable outlook.

Meanwhile a bit of evidence at last that it is not all doom and gloom in the Far East. Acer's decision to press ahead with its computer plant in South Wales demonstrates that the Taiwanese economy, at least, is not suffering from quite the same Asian flu that has infected the rest of the region.

Unfortunately, the battle to bring

Acer to these shores has brought on a nasty outbreak of that well-documented British disease otherwise known as inward investmentitis. In its most virulent form, competing regions of the country outbid one another for foreign manufacturing projects so extravagantly that it leaves the taxpayer nursing a very painful hole in his wallet.

The illness is said to be endemic in the valleys, nor does it appear to discriminate between political parties. William Hague contracted a Korean dose of it when he was running the show and persuaded Lucky Goldstar to set up in the principality.

Now Ron Davies, Labour's Welsh Secretary, seems to have contracted a strain from Taipei, if his envious competitors in the North East are to be believed.

We have not been told how much the Welsh Development Agency is paying to get Acer and its jobs into Cardiff but we do know that it is building the factory and the access roads for them and providing some training money.

Outbreaks of this sort were supposed to have been a thing of the past now that the Prime Minister has given Margaret Beckett the overall responsibility for vetting and co-ordinating bids for inward investment projects.

However, having got the antidote she seems to have gone all squeamish about inserting the needle. Come on nurse. Temperatures are getting dangerously high here.

IMF under fire from Asean leaders as S Korea floats won

South Korea bowed to intense IMF pressure yesterday and announced it would let its currency float on the open market from today. Richard Lloyd Parry reports from Seoul on the financial fire-fighting ahead of Thursday's elections, while Stephen Vines reports on the meeting at which Far Eastern heads of state criticised the IMF's response to the region's crisis.

The news that Korea would give up its struggle to limit movements in the won, and allow the currency to float against the dollar, came after the intervention by the Bank of Korea that boosted the exchange rate by its maximum daily amount of 10 per cent. It closed at 1,563.9 won to the dollar, while the key share price index climbed to 385.80.

A Bank of Korea official said: "The decision was made at the request of the IMF. At first we tried to resist, but the IMF request was so strong."

The move was welcomed by the financial markets, with analysts predicting that the prospect of billions of dollars in emergency credit arranged by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) could now restore confidence in the country's shattered markets. The benchmark stock index soared 7.22 per cent – its biggest one-day

percentage rise – paring its loss for the year to 41 per cent.

But leaders of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (Asean), meeting in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur, criticised the industrialised nations for not providing enough assistance. The official communiqué cast doubt on the effectiveness of the international rescue packages.

The nosedive in Asia's stocks and currencies eased a little yesterday, although confidence remained fragile in a week of political uncertainty throughout the region.

In South Korea, where a new president will be elected in two days' time, the central bank is reported to have sold some \$200m to prop up the won on Friday. The election will be held on the same day that a \$3.6bn installment of IMF credit is due to be delivered, on top of \$5.6bn which has already been handed over.

The Bank of Korea had to step in after two leading presidential candidates said last week that they would renegotiate the terms of the IMF plan if elected. Over the weekend, however, a joint statement from the outgoing president, Kim Young Sam, and all three front runners pledged that the package would be put into action as agreed.

In Tokyo share prices were little changed yesterday, although the yen weakened after a deeply gloomy business survey. Much attention will be focused today on a tax-cutting plan due to be announced by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, but few expect the measures to be radical.

The Bank of Japan admitted its next survey is likely to show even worse business morale. The yen weakened to ¥131.60 to the dollar, the lowest for more than five and a half years.

At the Asean leaders' meeting, Mahathir Mohamad, the Malaysian Prime Minister, yesterday admitted that South-east Asian countries themselves were at fault for building up a high degree of indebtedness. However, he returned to his familiar combative style in criticising the IMF for the high price it was extracting for its rescue packages for Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, as well as South Korea.

"I would think the IMF is looking purely at the macro-economic picture and not seeing the impact of measures required of client states," said Mr Mahathir. He predicted that "lots of companies, including very good companies, will probably fold up".

The Malaysian leader's comments were reflected in the meeting's communiqué, which noted that the IMF rescue had not restored confidence. It described the region's crisis as part of a global problem and said that Europe, Japan and the United States should be doing more to assist.

The leaders in Kuala Lumpur were torn between an anxiety not to provoke further market turmoil while wanting to emphasise the gravity of the crisis. As they met, the Indonesian and Thai currencies plunged to new lows while the Malaysian and Philippine currencies also declined.



South Korean dealers during trading of US dollars at the Korea Exchange Bank in Seoul yesterday. During the morning session, the dollar fell to 1,675 won from 1,710 won of last Friday's session. Photograph: Ahn Young-joon/AP

OECD makes upbeat forecast for West

Prospects for the western economies have improved in the past six months despite the Asian crisis, according to a new forecast from the OECD. But its optimism depends on member countries getting their policies right. Diane Coyle, Economics Editor, weighs up the risks.

An "exceptional" performance by the American economy and a firmer recovery in Europe explain the more upbeat outlook in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's semi-annual economic forecast. It has revised up its predictions for growth in the world's 29 leading economies, saying they will expand by almost 3 per

cent in 1998, just a shade lower than this year.

The influential forecast pencils in a soft landing for the UK, with growth slowing to a sustainable pace and inflation close to its target. It foresees no further rise in interest rates but warns that unemployment will start to rise next year.

The OECD also cautions that a minimum wage at too high a level would "jeopardise the employability of the low-skilled". In a submission to the commission on the minimum wage it has recommended a lower rate or an exemption for young workers.

Its prediction that the Asian crisis is set to have a relatively subdued impact on the rest of the world is likely to prove controversial. Although the report says the turmoil could potentially cut OECD growth by as much as 1 per cent over the next two years, it says member coun-

tries will use interest rate policy to offset the Asian spillover.

"Central banks can see it coming, and they should be able to absorb a lot of the effect by lower interest rates," said Paul Atkinson, head of economic assessment for the OECD. The worst of the crisis would therefore be confined to Asia itself, with the forecasts for Japan and Korea slashed.

However, some economists believe there is a risk recession in Asia will have a serious impact on the US and Europe. Gerard Lyons at DKB International said: "It is right to take a cautious view about prospects for the rest of the world."

The OECD concedes that the outlook does depend on its Asian members, Japan and Korea, carrying out the appropriate policies too. It recommends tax cuts in Japan but worries that government policy measures

"appear to be approaching their feasible limits."

For Korea, the document predicts a sharp slowdown from this year's likely growth rate of 6.2 per cent. The forecast for the OECD area as a whole in 1998 is that GDP will expand by 2.9 per cent, compared with the 2.7 per cent growth rate pencilled in earlier this year. There are almost no signs of inflationary pressure.

Britain's GDP is likely to expand by 2.2 per cent, a downgrade from 2.7 per cent. The successive interest rate increases since 1 May get the credit for cooling the economy to a steadier pace. In the money markets, sterling fell below 2.90 against the German mark, a 1 per cent fall on the day.

However, the report warns that the unemployment rate is unlikely to fall much further despite the Government's welfare-to-work programme.

Three Arrows ponders stock market flotation

Three Arrows, the company that helps drivers with repairs and insurance claims if they have an accident that is not their fault, is considering a stock market flotation.

The Manchester-based group has appointed NatWest Markets, the investment bank, to look at the options for the business through Chris Norman. Three Arrows' founder and owner, says he has yet to make a firm decision.

Three Arrows specialises in credit hire and repair. After an accident, the company directs the unfortunate driver to a garage, provides them with a hire car while their vehicle is being repaired and then chases up the claim with the offending driver's insurance company.

A float has been made more likely by the success of Helphire, a similar business that floated in March.

Since coming to the market at 100p Helphire's share price has soared, hitting a new high of 292p last week.

Mr Norman said that until now the company's growth had been funded from its own resources.

"We have very little bank borrowings," he said.

But he pointed out that raising funds on the stock market would be necessary if the company decided to increase its rate of growth and expand the credit repair side of the business.

The latter is particularly cash-hungry because the company tends to pay garages for repairs promptly, while it frequently has to wait several months for insurance companies to cough up.

However, increased competition means credit hire and repair companies have no option but to offer the service to garages in order to get them sign up.

"You have to offer it, it's the only way you'll get the business," Mr Norman said.

Helphire, which is forecast to make a pretax profit of £2.5m in the year to March 1998, has a market value of £47.6m.

But Three Arrows is larger and would be able to command a better price tag. In the year to August 1997 the company made pretax profits of £6m on turnover of £20m.

— Peter Thal Larsen

Nationwide heightens mortgage rivalry

Nationwide yesterday announced it would keep its mortgage rates substantially lower than its quoted rivals indefinitely – unless interest rates rose again. Andrew Verity reports on the latest volley in the war between the mutuals and their rivals.

The UK's largest building society claimed the "mutuality gap" allowed it to go on offering rates at least 60 basis points lower than its rivals such as the Halifax, which were obliged to pay dividends to shareholders.

The announcement defied expectations that Nationwide would be forced by the rising

cost of lending to raise its rates in January, when it will increase the rate of interest it pays on savings accounts.

Nationwide is selling new variable rate mortgages at 8.1 per cent, while the Halifax charges 8.7 per cent. The building society is at the same time competing with supermarkets such as Tesco and Sainsbury by offering an instant access postal account which pays interest of 6.7 per cent.

The margin between the best savings rates and borrowing rates, from which the building society extracts most of its profit, is now less than 1.5 points, leading quoted lenders to question whether Nationwide's position is sustainable.

In contrast, Halifax offers interest of just 3.45 per cent on its instant access account, leaving it with a margin of more

than 4.5 per cent between saving and lending rates.

Brian Davis, Nationwide's chief executive, said: "After a tremendously successful 1997, we are continuing to build on the natural advantage we hold as a building society."

He added: "Over the typical life of a mortgage, 7 years, and based on rates available from 1 January, a Nationwide borrower would be £1,911 better off. We aim to make 1998 a happy new year for all our customers."

However, Nationwide was careful to stress that the promise would not hold if the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee decides again to raise base rates.

The move follows an announcement last week by Bradford & Bingley, another mutual building society, that it would

raise interest rates for savers by up to 0.45 percentage points. It is now offering 6.8 per cent on its instant access postal account and is pledged not to boost its variable rate of 7.95 per cent before 1 February.

However, Bradford & Bingley's subsidiary, Mortgage Express, has been unable to demonstrate the benefits of mutuality. Rather than trading on the gap between savings and borrowings, the wholly-owned company has itself to pay market rates when it borrows capital on the money markets.

A spokesman for the Halifax said standard variable rates were less relevant now that the vast majority of new mortgages were fixed-rate loans. But he conceded that the bulk of existing borrowers, who have variable rate mortgages, would be affected.

Savings industry criticises latest appointment to the FSA

Howard Davies, the chairman of the Financial Services Authority (FSA), has appointed the man behind the decision to launch the mammoth review of mis-sold pensions to be one of the main advisers to the super-regulator's new board. The decision is likely to aggravate a savings industry already smarting about the board's lack of industry representatives.

Michael Blair, the key policy former who led the decision to launch the pension mis-selling review in 1994, was yesterday appointed as the top adviser to the board of directors of the FSA.

The decision to appoint Mr Blair, currently deputy chief executive of the Securities and Investment Board (SIB), drew immediate criticism from a sav-

ings industry which privately believes the mis-selling review was the product of a great miscalculation by the regulators.

Industry practitioners said that while Mr Blair was respected as a regulator, his appointment would further alienate practitioners from a new regulator which now had very little top-level input from the industry.

Geoffrey Pointon, a former board member of financial advice regulator Fimbra, said: "Mr Davies has got a major challenge on his hands to show that he is in touch with the industry. Many feel that the review has blighted the industry for too long and now, with politicians getting involved, it is going to continue."

While leading industry figures have accepted the pension review as a necessary evil, many believe that SIB, the FSA's predecessor, failed to calculate the effort required to complete it.

The deadline for completing the review of 90 per cent of the most urgent cases of mis-selling was set in 1994 for 1 January 1996. But during 1995 and 1996 the review became mired in legal disputes and even the most urgent phase is more than two years behind schedule.

The FSA yesterday said preference for the new posts had been given to insiders at the old regulators, although external advisers had been appointed to monitor the recruitment.

— Andrew Verity

Siemens talk puts Motion Media in the spotlight

MARKET REPORT



CATHY NEWMAN

Motion Media, the Oxford-listed minnow which sells video phones, has been getting in the picture. The company has been climbing for a few days now, and was up another 10p to 190p yesterday.

Dealers are gambling on a large overseas order for the video-phones, which cost £1,000 each. Industry pundits say Siemens may be about to place an order with Motion worth up to £100m. The German electronics behemoth has pledged to supply 100,000 phones to Deutsche Telekom, and may turn to Motion to fulfil the demand.

Motion is also thought to be talking to BT and Alcatel about its products, which also include television set-top boxes. It is expected to have sold its thousandth video-phone by Christmas.

Elsewhere, Shell might

have adopted the advertising slogan of a certain blue-chip telecoms company, proving beyond all reasonable doubt that it's good to talk.

The oil company saw its share-price zoom 20.5p to end the session at 448.5p after a round of briefings with investors on Friday. Since then, brokers' buy notes have been raining down on Shell like confetti. NatWest is "very positive" on the company, and has included it in its top 15 for 1998. Hoare Govett, Kleinwort Benson and SBC Warburg all joined the Shell appreciation society, after being impressed by the company's plans for the next five years. Shell has pledged to make a 13 per cent return on capital next year, and has also hinted that a share buy-back might be a possibility if Dutch law is changed. Investors also wel-

comed a commitment to greater transparency, which will see the company reporting its results in dollars.

More than 20 million shares changed hands, making it the most heavily traded Footsie stock. Cairn Energy firmed 1.5p in sympathy to 510p. Shell and Cairn announced last month that they were hoping to invest up to \$5bn in exploration and development in Bangladesh.

Another to exude a certain oily charm yesterday was Tullow Oil. The group, which started the year well below the 100p mark, ended up 6.75p at 153.5p, with dealers saying a bid was on the cards. Enterprise Oil also notched up 2p to 589p.

Dealers appeared to be suffering from Christmas party hangovers during the morning, with Footsie struggling to gain

ground. The index soon rallied, ending up 7.6h points at 5121.8, but volume was low. An uneventful 599.1m shares changed hands.

Apart from oils, banks were in demand. Barclays closed 79p richer at £17.15, and Lloyds TSB jumped 28p to 765p. A new finance director at Abbey National helped it to a 39p rise to £10.57. But

the real story behind the financials' strength was once again bid speculation. Hopes of further consolidation are rife, prompted by comments in the weekend press from Barclays' chief executive.

Cordiant, the advertising and marketing group which closed at 110p on Friday night, finally did the splits yesterday, and received a somewhat cool reception. Cordiant Commu-

nications, which comprises the Bates Worldwide agency, dropped a penny to 109p, while Saatchi & Saatchi fared marginally better, closing unchanged at 110p.

Demergers talk proved a panacea for Coats Viyella, however. The textile group, which owns the Jaeger clothes chain, was in fashion, adding 13.5p to end at 115p. It said yesterday it would be issuing its December trading statement

on Wednesday, where it would talk about proposals for a split. Several brokers, mindful that the year is drawing to a close, have turned their attention to 1998 forecasts. UBS recommended nine stocks for 1998, including Galfaher, which improved 9.5p to 354.5p, and Logica, which ended 7.5p better off at £10.60.

NatWest, meanwhile, tipped Pearson, up 27p at 840p. Abbey National, and Barclays. The investment house believes Footsie will end next year edging towards the 6,000 mark at 5,700.

Sedgwick, the insurance broker, had a field day in the morning after a report over the weekend that it had been talking to Aon about a merger. However, the company issued a statement later in the day denying the story, so the shares closed just 2p up at 150p.

Share price spotlight
share price, pence
Tullow Oil
DJF MAM J A S O N D



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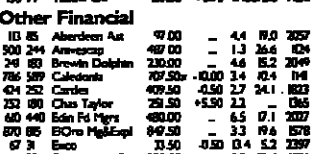
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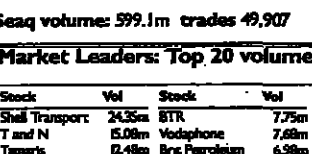
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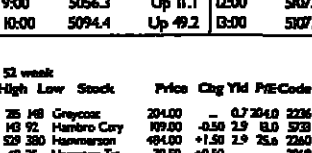
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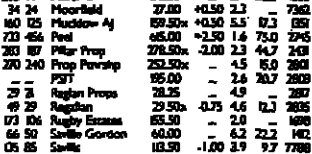
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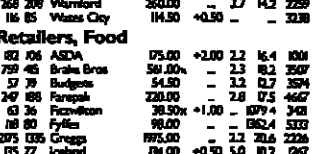
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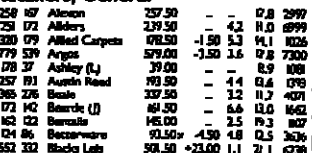
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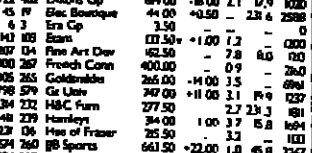
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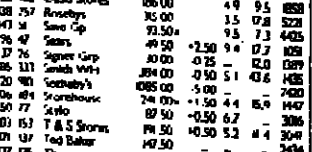
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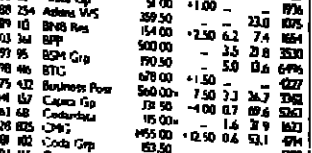
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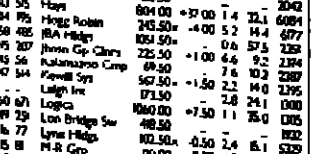
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TAKING STOCK

AIM-listed Property Assets Holdings (PAH) made its debut yesterday. The company, which acquires property in and around London, placed at 7p, has around £9m to spend on property which will provide an above-average return on the investment. It already has interests in the King's Road, and in south-west London.

Audio Book & Music Holdings (ABM), the Oxford-listed company which markets and distributes audio books and music, obtained a £500,000 secured term loan to expand its operations and stock a wider range of products. ABM added 5p to 100p, and was also buoyed by news of an agreement with Virgin/Our Price to supply audio books.

Share Price Data
Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield is the latest twelve months' declared gross dividend as a percentage of the share price. The price/earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, excluding extraordinary items but including exceptional items. Other details: E.R. = Earnings Ratio; S.D. = Standard Deviation; P.D. = Price Dividend Ratio; G.P. = Gross Profit Ratio; B.G. = Bookings Ratio.

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Sequoia volume: 599.1m trades 49,907
Market Leaders: Top 20 volumes
at 15:00h

Stock	Vol	Stock	Vol	Stock	Vol	Stock	Vol
Shell	24,500	BT	7,500	United TSB	6,400	Telecom	5,200
British Telecom	12,000	BT	7,500	United TSB	6,400	Telecom	5,200
British Telecom	12,000	BT	7,500	United TSB	6,400	Telecom	5,200

Guinness	5.78m	Halifax	4.72m
Halfway	5.39m	Brit Airways	4.71m
Glasgow Wellcome	5.21m	Ned Grid Group	4.66m

	16:00	5091.0	Up 45.8
Up 64.2	15:00	5099.2	Up 54.0
Up 61.8	14:00	5115.7	Up 70.5
Up 62.6	Close	5121.8	Up 76.6

32 week	High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E Code
489.30			Macro 1	340.00	-	9.3	10.1 258
66.20			McConnell Info	46.50	+0.50	-	272
97.36			Metromed Abbey	55.00b	-0.50	1.5	30.6 277
2269.65			Micro Focus	2222.50	+35.00	-	294
879.70			Northern	75.50	-	12.9	5.0 294
85.84			NOVA Play	1750.00	-10.00	0.9	32.5 294

246	56	NITTE Grp	243.50	-	1.0	30.1	2285
46	24	Orbita	44.50	+3.50	17	12.4	765
683	357	Parke	626.50	-1.00	0.3	40.3	6265
54	57	Pharm-Me	51.50	+0.50	5.6	13.3	692
33	11	Protonfont	32.00	+2.00	-	-	620
423	230	PSD	48.50	+6.00	-	-	1048
261	24	Quality Stores	222.50	-	-	102.5	658
86	100	Reward Econ	83.00	+0.50	2.9	7.8	6478
190	101	Sealed Air	185.00	-	4.6	20.8	5695
278	108	Rembrandt Corp	255.00	+0.75	1.2	29.8	7778
256	103	Ricardo Grp	265.50	+3.50	5.2	4.8	288

93 43	Redwood Corp	75.00	+0.30	1.5	45.3	3890
93 45	REI	76.00a		1.5	25.3	3890
47 80	Robert Whelan	47.00	+6.50		42.3	3900
43 288	Roberts & N	39.50		2.0	24.0	1400
223 125	RPS Corp	70.00	+9.00	2.6	9.8	6200
85 485	Sage	81.00		0.4	34.6	6500
150 60	Salomon (C)	99.00		9.9	6.5	1400
150 92	Sanderson	69.50a	+3.50	8.8	18.0	7600
673 336	State Apptx	140.00	+7.50	0.4	35.2	5080
1465 1038	Serra Corp	145.00		0.4	6.8	5800
528 625	Sherco Inc	84.50		0.3	41.8	2520
136 06	Sierra-Mt	42.50a	-2.00	1.1	71.0	7200

076	08	Shenck Ind	82.50	-	3.00	1.1	23.0	700
025	08	Shenck Ind	425.00	-	+0.00	1.4	22.1	2500
5	30	Simon Group	38.50	-	-	-	-	1500
009	44	Smoothing	44.50	-1.00	-	-	-	2650
238	02	Sollberg	58.50	-1.00	2.9	0.3	790	
233	02	Sore-Plant	05.00	-	8.3	9.4	270	
90	44	Torax	75.00	-	1.5	0.4	4200	
008	07	UDC	82.50	-	72	4.6	3800	
246	05	Universal Sel	805.00	-	62	12.5	440	
303	54	Vega Co	287.50	+0.00	3.1	15.8	5840	
300	20	Warner Hor	20.00	-	2.2	0.5	590	

32	Week	High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Code
32	Week	High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Code
32	Week	High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E	Code

32 249	Seawater	307.00	-0.50	0.6	24.8	27.2	100
35 62	SoftWax	79.00	-1.30	—	—	22.6	100
41 236	Vodafone	455.00x	+6.00	1.5	35.7	357	100

Textiles & Apparel

09 78	Alexandra W	121.50	—	6.6	—	105	100
204 00	Allied Text	138.50	-1.50	7.7	6.9	155	100
234 66	Baldt (Wm)	209.00x	+0.50	5.8	—	745	100
36 00	Bridport-Gr	18.50x	—	4.7	11.9	730	100
106 00	Charmco	72.00x	—	0.6	—	346	100
143 31	Coca Vytella	15.00x	+0.50	8.8	14.1	145	100

378	207	Downsides Tex	341.00	+2.50	5.3	287.9	2080
259	166	Chemicals Gp	236.50	+0.50	2.4	0.7	2080
10	4	Fl Gp	10.50	+6.00	~	24.5	2650
10	4	Marathon Gp	8.75	+0.25	6.9	~	2280
360	270	Hickory P	269.50	-2.00	3.6	~	2280
8	2	Holtes	2.50	~	~	~	2280
378	253	Jonas Steel	358.50	-0.50	3.8	0.0	2370
195	116	Lamson	071.00	-1.00	7.5	6.4	2400
071	025	Leeds Gp	83.50	-6.00	7.7	7.1	2400
32	20	Lowry Ind	22.00	+1.25	1.8	~	2650
-	-	Manning Inc	16.25	~	1.5	~	2650

10	04	Parkland Cp	76.50	-	1.5	-	
07	46	Pennsld Cp	25.00	-2.50	6.1	5.7	2732
40	25	Pennsld Cp	88.00	-	4.4	26.1	1620
10	25	Realco Inc	-41.00	-1.25	7.9	34.0	1620
09	27	Sherrwood Cp	31.00	+1.50	14.5	8.2	2942
74	51	Sider	52.00	-	0.2	7.5	2953
4	32	Starling	39.00	-	7.5	10.0	3003
205	00	Wardale	141.00	-	7.1	13.1	0
Tobacco							
454	462	BAT Inds	548.00	+0.00	5.9	11.2	2222
355	244	Gallatin	35.50	+9.50	-	0.3	2222

32	36	Input	Tob	396.00	+4.50	6.7	9.8	127
Transport								
293	85	Armor	Port Svs	161.00	-	1.6	14.0	480
320	247	A & B	Ports	299.50	-0.50	3.4	8.3	1000
444	330	Arctic		138.00	-1.50	4.4	10.8	
04	04	Auto	Eq	172.50	-	-	-	199
64	46	BAA		569.00	+	-	-	759
764	51	Bt Airways		572.00	+20.00	3.4	10.1	625
-	-	General Transp		16.00	-	-	47.2	304
10	18	Clarkson M		65.50	-	4.7	9.8	106
10	10							

32	10	Clayco	139.50	+3.50	4.5	10.3	3785
32	98	Dart Corp	309.00	+6.00	2.5	16.0	1409
32	82	Downs Group	260.00	-	3.6	13.6	1494
32	59	Eurochem	140.50	-0.50	-	-	6894
32	256	185	222.00	-1.00	3.3	13.9	4020
32	157	157	129.00	-	2.9	8.3	7535
32	645	645	673.50	+2.50	27	18.9	5320
32	539	424	538.50	+4.00	1.9	10.5	6660
32	32	32	491.50	-	2.5	10.5	2284
32	158	158	56.00	-	3.1	21.1	3852
32	104	70	80.50	-	3.1	23.7	2525

32	34	High Docks	45.00	-	31	33	2389
62	64	Nor	-	-	37	43	1099
82	84	Nor, Express	404.50	-	2.5	44	6535
88	92	NFC	10.50	-	54	248.7	476
44	46	Ocean Grp	59.50	-2.00	34	20.6	366
58	60	Ocean Wharf	105.50	-	-	-	2765
78	82	P & O	656.00	+5.00	5.8	16.4	874
165	165	Railroads	944.00s	-3.00	3.0	16.2	491
305	305	Seas	37.50	-	2.0	25.0	391
980	980	Seagrowth	800.00	+6.00	1.4	25.2	1094
563	540	Thalco & B	567.50	+3.50	3.6	19.9	376
976	976	Thalco	-	-	-	-	-

32 week	High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E Code
32 week	High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E Code
32 week	High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E Code

32 week	High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E Code
32 week	High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E Code
32 week	High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E Code

Stock	Price	Chg(p)
Recent Issues		
grainco	53.00	0.00
grainco & West Md	50.75	0.25
Ameyell Lard	50.50	0.00
Ameyell Co	55.00	0.00

Caroline	205.00	0.00
MSY (Jersey)	425.00	0.00
Northern Rock	564.00	4.00
Northern Trust B	33.00	-1.00
Sum B	9.00	0.00

source: **Bloomberg**
www.bloomberg.com

32 week	High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E Code
32 week	High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E Code
32 week	High	Low	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	P/E Code

Source: Bloomberg
www.bloomberg.com



**HAMISH
McRAE**

ON SEASONAL PROSPECTS FOR THE RETAIL SECTOR

It feels fuzzy, doesn't it? Falling unemployment, stable prices for consumer goods and many consumer services, a solid increase in real personal disposable income, the wealth effect from rising house prices, the lagged impact of the windfall gains from the building society conversions - a series of features have come together to boost the feel-good factor this Christmas. So it would be astounding were it not to be a good season for the retailers.

But what happens next? There is a whiff of fear in the air, and not just in the City where there is a nagging doubt that the bonuses this year will be the last good haul for a while. The OECD is downgrading its forecasts for growth next year - though domestic conditions in the UK are not a major part of the downgrades. Meanwhile, there are just the few odd pre-Christmas sales around, reminiscent of the desperation of retailers in the last recession, and puzzling in the middle of what the figures say is a boom.

Let's stand back a moment and try and identify what we really know for sure, what we can reasonably guess, and what we cannot possibly know. We know the big ticket story: you can see that in the graph on the left, showing the last three years of car sales. It is a pretty jagged trend, to be sure, but

Will this be the last hot Christmas for the UK?

the general direction is nevertheless securely upwards. In particular there does not seem to have been the usual autumnal slump - November car sales were up 13 per cent on last year, the highest on record. Now look at the CBI distributive trade survey and the John Lewis weekly sales growth on the other graph. The CBI series gives a good indication of the mood among retailers, because it is asking questions of retailers rather than dealing in hard data, while the John Lewis figures give a very precise and speedy set of hard numbers from an admittedly narrow base. Both show a fall-off in sales in November, but as the Merrill Lynch team (who pulled together these numbers) point out, the trend in sales has been particularly volatile this year, with the collapse in September (probably associated with the death of Diana, Princess of Wales) and the bounce-back in October. And as noted above, there is just a faint twinkle in the latest reports from the shops: some are going wonderfully, but there is hesitation elsewhere.

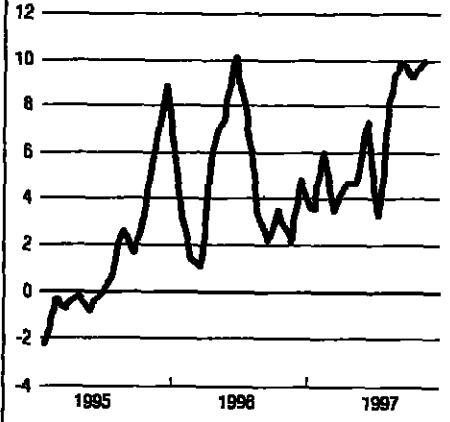
Now we move towards the areas where we have to make a decent guess. We do know that retail demand generally is pretty strong, and we also know that there are pockets of resistance. We can therefore deduce that prices are particularly important: the world of very low inflation (and falling prices for consumer electronic goods) has taken pressure off the buyer to move fast.

Indeed, the reverse effect happens: the longer the buyer dithers, the more likely he or she is to find that next time the price is lower - not an incentive to rush out.

We also know that the windfall gains will not be repeated: thanks to these most buyers are not "liquidity-constrained" at the moment, but they know that next year will not be the

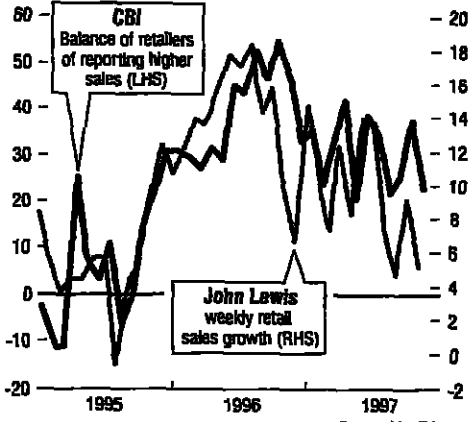
The run-up to Christmas

The trend in car sales... % change last 3 months, yoy



...and in the shops

CBI Balance of retailers of reporting higher sales (LHS)



same. When a big ticket item has fallen dramatically in price - foreign holidays are a good example - sales whizz away. But, overall, there is a repeat of the phenomenon of three years ago when every time sellers tried to up prices, sales slumped.

Looking ahead, we can make a reasonable guess that next year will be much quieter than last. Forget for the moment about the possible slower growth, forget about the (very real) chance that unemployment may be rising in the second half of next year, we know that the windfall effect will be over. That alone will ensure a consumer slow-down.

What has happened is the National Lottery in reverse. When the lottery began, it sliced a chunk out of retail spending and put it, after a time-lag, into long-term capital investment projects. The windfalls take a chunk of money out of UK income, and put part of it into consumer goods. It took about 18 months for the lottery effect to work its way through the system, and I guess it will be about the same for the windfalls. By next summer we will be back to normal.

What I think will happen is that the twinges of concern evident now will become more marked. Some sectors, particularly those where competition and the strong pound continues to drive prices down will continue to prosper. Others, in particular those supported by one-off gains (be they from building society conversion or City bonuses) will have a much tougher time. I would, for example, be surprised if car sales next autumn are as strong as they have been this one, or foreign holiday bookings for 1999 will be as buoyant as bookings for next summer.

For next year is the year when the economy comes off the curve: when it has to adjust from faster-than-trend growth to, if things go right, trend growth, and if things do not, below trend growth. It is always difficult making that transition and we cannot assume that the new team at the Treasury and the new team at the Bank of England will be able to micro-manage it particularly well.

Meanwhile, we should all remember the lessons of the early 1990s and be aware that booms do not run on for ever.

PEOPLE & BUSINESS

JOHN WILLCOCK



"It's the end of an era", one seasoned City campaigner murmured yesterday, as the banks finally pulled the plug on Brent Walker.

It had to happen, really. The pubs to betting shops group founded by "Gorgeous" George Walker entered that twilight world of "the work-out" six years ago, groaning under debts of £1.4bn. Now it is in receivership. At the beginning of this month the present management sold off the last big asset, the 1,700-strong William Hill betting shop chain, to Nomura. The Pubmaster group was sold over a year ago.

So at 7.30 yesterday morning Scott Barnes and Martin Ellis of accountants Grant Thornton were sent in as receivers to flog off the remaining bits and pieces.

Mr Walker, the former East End boxer, was thrown out by the banks years ago. The last chief executive, John Leach, was sacked by the receivers along with the rest of the remaining board yesterday. As one City hand put it, "Mr Leach has done a wonderful job for the banks by getting back around £1bn for them. So if anyone out there has a job for Mr Leach, that would be a great Christmas present for him."

Brent Walker's banks, led by Standard Chartered and Lloyds Bank, are still left with a bill for unpaid interest of around half a billion. No Yuletide stocking fillers for them, I fear.

Scott Barnes didn't want to talk too much about the worth of the remaining bits to be sold off, since Brent Walker's bonds are still traded on the secondary debt markets. All I would say is, don't get too excited.

Barrie Stephens is so keen to move to his new house in Florida that he has brought forward his retirement date from the chairmanship of Siebe, the engineering group,

from May to February. Mr Stephens will be 70 next year, having been with the company for 35 years, so I can't really blame him. Industrial control systems can lose their allure after a bit.

Mr Stephens's successor-designate Colin Marshall, as announced last July, is an exceedingly busy bee, and cannot take the helm at Siebe until he has completed his Presidency of the CBI. Let anyone forget, Mr Marshall is also chairman of British Airways, deputy chairman of BT and chairman of Incheape. Not to worry, Philip Beck, a board member of Siebe, has stepped forward to act as an interim chairman until Mr Marshall is ready.

More deck chair shuffling on the good ship Abbey National pending Peter Birch's retirement next March. The former building society has appointed one of the youngest finance directors in the FTSE 100 index. Congratulations to Mark Pain, a born and bred Brummie, who is currently group financial controller.

Mr Pain has been working for the chief executive designate Ian Harley for two and a half years, following a career with Deloitte & Touche and the TSB. Mr Pain puts his youthful success down to "a balanced portfolio of skills, a clear vision of the organisation and a lot of hard work."

He does have an Achilles Heel, however: "Tragically I'm a Manchester City supporter."

Other management changes at Abbey include Andrew Pople, managing director, retail, who is assuming responsibility for general insurance business. Mr Pople masterminded the acquisition of Scottish Mutual. His nick-name at Abbey is "love child", because, I'm told, colleagues were jealous at his rapid (and fully deserved) rise to prominence.

The glossy solicitors' magazine *Legal Business* has just published its annual Christmas Quiz. The last question reads: "Which City lawyers are known as a) Swinging Dick b) Hissing Sid c) The Flying Fornicator d) Bedwetting Bob?"

I can't wait for the answers.

WH Brakspear, the brewing and pub company, has hired David Gyle-Thompson, chairman of Whitbread of Cheshire, to groom the company for a market listing. Jim Burrows, Brakspear's chief executive, said that Mr Gyle-Thompson was the man for the job since he had just led the tea and coffee retailer through its own flotation. Brakspear has also appointed Roger Budd to run its managed estate. Mr Budd and Burrows are old buddies from the days when they both worked for Whitbread.

Foreign Exchange Rates

Country	Spot	1 month	3 month
UK	10000		
Australia	24822	24795	24733
Canada	20348	20316	20296
Denmark	58677	58640	58600
France	27659	27625	27589
Germany	11025	11008	10992
Italy	14921	14894	14867
Japan	87357	87321	87285
Netherlands	9698	96951	96915
Sweden	29838	29802	29766
Switzerland	45605	45569	45533
Hong Kong	2247	22448	22412
India	1923	19206	19170
Malaysia	28342	28306	28270
Philippines	26377	26341	26305
Singapore	21547	21511	21475
South Africa	7947	79440	79404
Spain	24779	24743	24707
Sweden	12687	12651	12615
Switzerland	23831	23795	23759
US	15912		

Interest Rates

Dollar	1 month	3 month	D-Mark
06190	06199	06168	03456
15617	15222	15220	08678
24476	24242	24248	70322
35454	35454	35454	08078
14204	14248	14257	09007
67589	67404	67220	35122
11758	11758	11758	08078
53954	53422	53252	30790
11758	11758	11758	08078
17739	17739	17647	10000
27915	29183	28808	67781
11758	11758	11758	08078
14535	14532	14539	01894
77375	77375	77384	97948
11758	11758	11758	08078
38705	38746	38950	21819
11758	11758	11758	08078
19534	19534	19571	42620
05921	16880	18959	03238
67404	67404	67404	08078
81352	81352	81352	10000
37506	37504	37526	08078
14204	14204	14204	08078
49890	49890	49890	27535
15017	14839	14839	84589
14204	14204	14204	08078
14375	14254	14263	08070

Bond Yields

Country	3mth	6mth	1yr	2yr	3yr	5yr	10yr	30yr
Australia	5.00	4.82	4.68	4.52	4.38	4.22	4.06	3.90
Canada	5.00	4.82	4.68	4.52	4.38	4.22	4.06	3.90
Denmark	4.00	3.82	3.68	3.52	3.38	3.22	3.06	2.90
France	4.00	3.82	3.68	3.52	3.38	3.22	3.06	2.90
Germany	4.00	3.82	3.68	3.52	3.38	3.22	3.06	2.90
Italy	5.00	4.82	4.68	4.52	4.38	4.22	4.06	3.90
Japan	0.50	0.42	0.38	0.32	0.28	0.22	0.16	0.10
Netherlands	4.00	3.82	3.68	3.52	3.38	3.22	3.06	2.90
Sweden	4.00	3.82	3.68	3.52	3.38	3.22	3.06	2.90
Switzerland	4.00	3.82	3.68	3.52	3.38	3.22	3.06	2.90
US	5.07	4.82	4.68	4.52	4.38	4.22	4.06	3.90

Money Market Rates

US Prime	850%	Japan Discount	050%
Discount	500%	Belgium Discount	275%
and Funds	594%	Discount	330%
Spain		Central	
D Repo	475%	Switzerland	
Sweden		Discount	
period (Avg)	410%	Lombard	263%

	chg	5 yr	chg	10 yr	chg
-0.08	5.77	-0.09	6.11	-0.09	
0.01	4.87	-0.01	5.43	-0.01	
0.01	5.37	-0.01	5.66	-0.01	
0.02	4.99	0.00	5.40	0.00	
-0.01	4.81	-0.01	5.29	-0.01	
-0.02	4.87	-0.01	5.29	-0.02	
0.02	5.27	-0.02	5.73	-0.01	
0.01	1.18	-0.02	1.89	-0.01	
-0.01	4.52	-0.01	5.29	-0.01	
-0.01	5.06	-0.05	5.58	-0.03	
-0.07	5.68	0.00	5.96	0.00	
-0.06	5.20	-0.02	5.32	-0.02	
-0.01	6.52	-0.01	6.29	-0.01	
-0.03	2.91	-0.02	5.71	-0.02	

Life Financial Futures

Contract	Settlement	High	Low	Open
Long GFI	Dec-97	12105	12105	12105
Short GFI	Dec-97	12105	12105	12105
Long GFI	Dec-97	12105	12105	12105
Short GFI	Dec-97	12105	12105	12105

Life FTSE 100 Index Option

Series	Call	Put	Call	Put
5050	342	27	25	26
5100	311	28	24	25
5150	280	29	23	24
5200	250	30	22	23

Industrial Metals

LME (\$/tonne)		Cash	
Aluminum HG	1314	1315	
Aluminum Alloy	1388	1389	
Copper A	1781	1782	
Lead	516	517	
Nickel	5935	5945	-
Tin	5355	5365	-
Zinc	1050	1059	

Precious Metals			
pm	fix'd	per oz	pm
Platinum	254.00	220	1425
Palladium	194.00	725	76.25
Silver	5.96	0.18	18.18
Gold	263.80	0.60	85.40

Agricultural			
Cocoa		Coffee	
LFPE	\$/tonne	LFPE	\$/tonne
Dec/97	11850	Nov/97	672.00
Mar/98	11470	Jan/98	610.00
May/98	1065.00	Mar/98	612.00
Vol:	6158	Vol:	4537

Precious Metals

	3 month	6mg	LME stock
10	1540	1541	539725
11	1490	1493	47640
12	1780	1781	333550
13	530	531	-7 114200
14	6035	6040	-220 66334
15	5275	5280	-170 10585
16	1123	1124	-23 480200
per oz			
Day's	Year's		
27025	100	50	
11815	260	4830	
3.64	016	076	
Coins (\$)			
		Kruggerands	28036
		Nobles	65591
		Mexico	34905
		Maple Leaf	25435
= oz			
July	Potatoes		Live Pigs
17	LFPE	6080	NOV97
18	Nov97	6080	NOV97
19	Mar98	9100	NOV97
20	Apr98	12350	Jan98
21	56c	22	Vol:

Agricultural

<u>kg</u>	
00	
80	
00	
50	
18	
55	
<u>25</u>	
<u>g's</u>	
<u>12</u>	
60	
<u>35</u>	
<u>mm</u>	
88	
<u>kg</u>	
00	
00	
50	
0	

Latest Unit Trust Prices

Fund	Sell	Buy	Yield
AIM Growth Trust Ltd	23458	23468	0.00
4000 Bridge Lane, London SE1 2HR			
AIM Growth Trust Ltd	23458	23468	0.00
4000 Bridge Lane, London SE1 2HR			
AIM Growth Trust Ltd	23458	23468	0.00
4000 Bridge Lane, London SE1 2HR			

Fund	Sell	Buy	Yield
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4000 Bridge Lane, London SE1 2HR			

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Bloomberg

AMERICAN FOOTBALL

Cowboys' era ends as Jets buck trend

The Jacksonville Jaguars went in through the front door and Tampa Bay went in through the back - but two more teams missed their chance to clinch places in the NFL play-offs at the weekend. And, in a remarkable turnaround from the recent past, the Dallas Cowboys are out and the New York Jets are still in.

Four teams had a chance to claim post-season places with victories. Only Jacksonville did so, with a win, 30-14 over the Buffalo Bills.

Mark Brunell threw for 317 yards and a touchdown and ran for a score as the Jaguars secured at least a wild card berth in the AFC.

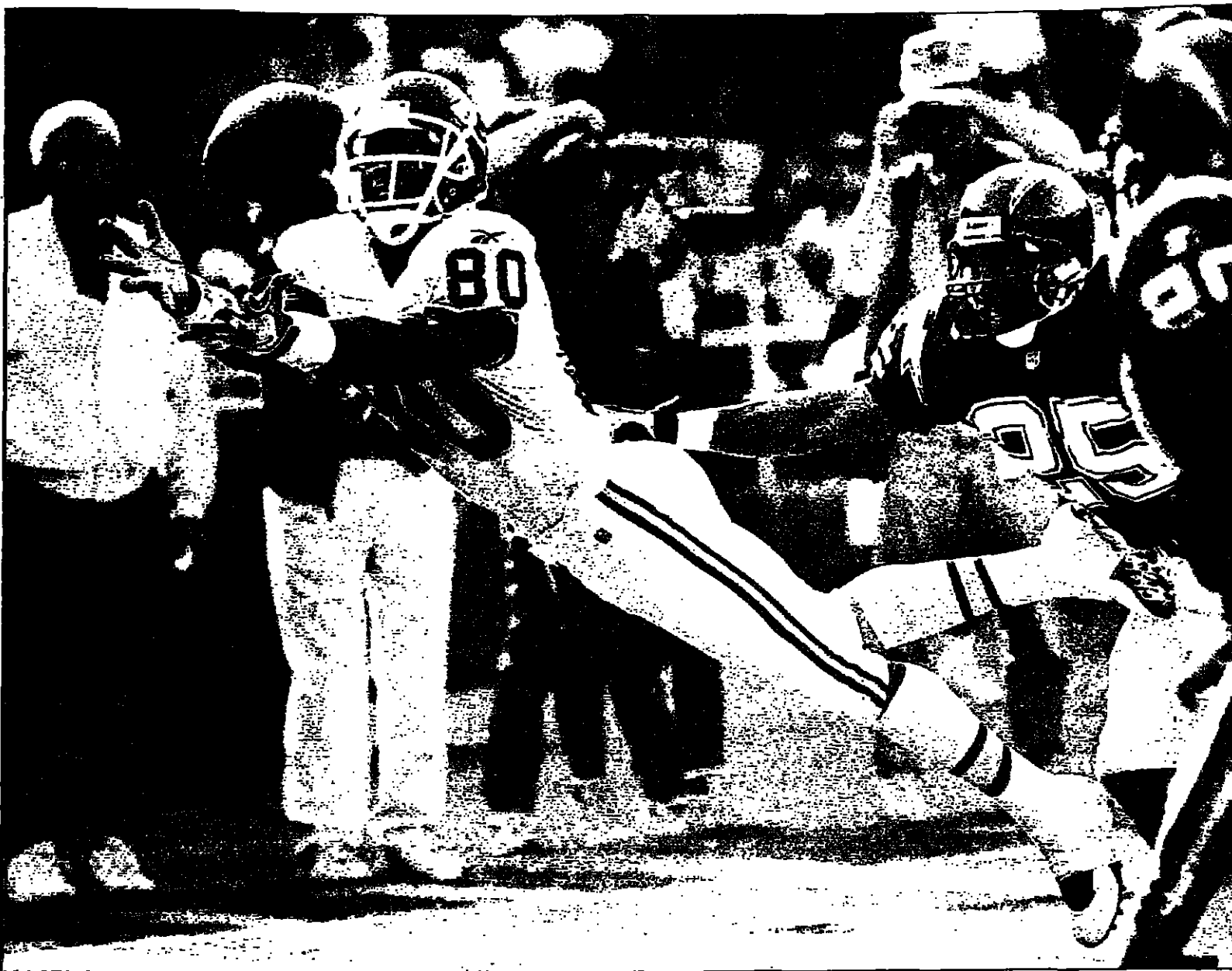
The other three - Tampa Bay, Minnesota and Miami - all went down to defeats, but the Buccaneers were assured of an NFC wild card place when the Super Bowl champions, Green Bay, defeated the Carolina Panthers in a rematch of last year's NFC championship game.

Brett Favre threw for 256 yards and three touchdowns in the 31-10 victory as the Packers eliminated the Panthers from play-off contention with one week remaining in the regular season.

That was good news for the Bucs in the wake of the New York Jets' 31-0 demolition job on them - the Jets' first win in a December game since 1993.

The often-criticised cornerback Otis Smith returned two interceptions for touchdowns as the Jets - who finished last season 1-15 - regained control of their play-off destiny by joining Miami and New England at the top of the AFC East with 9-6 records.

The rookie Leon Johnson returned a second-half kick-off 101 yards for a TD for the Jets, who had lost their previous two games. Bill Parcells' team



Stretching the point: Lake Dawson, of Kansas City, beats the San Diego defense to catch a touchdown pass in the Chiefs' victory

Photograph: AP

can now secure a play-off place by winning at Detroit on Sunday.

"Tampa Bay has seven guys in the Pro Bowl, but they have a young team, we got the jump on them and maybe they had a tough time keeping things in perspective," Parcells said. "They have a young team like us and today was our day."

Cincinnati beat Dallas 31-24, eliminating the Cowboys from play-off contention for the first time since 1990.

Boomer Esiason passed for

242 yards and two touchdowns as the Bengals erupted for 31 unanswered points and Corey Dillon rushed for 129 yards to become the third Cincinnati rookie to reach 1,000 yards in a season.

The Cowboys, who had won the last five NFC East titles, rallied for two touchdowns in the fourth quarter to make things interesting, before losing their fourth game in a row. That is Dallas' longest barren spell since losing their last seven games in 1989.

"We played a pretty good ball game, except for the second and third quarters, when it was disastrous," said the Dallas head coach, Barry Switzer.

Scott Mitchell's one-yard touchdown pass to Herman Moore with three seconds left gave the Detroit Lions hope for a possible play-off place with a 14-13 victory over the reeling Vikings, who have now lost five consecutive games.

Jim Harbaugh threw a career-high four TD passes, including three to tight end

Ken Dilger, as the Indianapolis Colts prevented the Miami Dolphins from clinching a play-off place with a 41-0 rout.

"Some days everything just goes wrong and this was just one of those days," said the Miami coach, Jimmy Johnson. "This was just a awful game."

Morten Andersen kicked the 25th game-winning field goal of his career, a 33-yarder as time expired, to give Atlanta their fifth successive win, 20-17 over Philadelphia.

The outcome extinguished

the Eagles' play-off dreams, and shortly thereafter Atlanta's own flickering hopes were snuffed out by Detroit's comeback over Minnesota.

The Kansas City Chiefs closed in on home field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs with a 29-7 victory over the San Diego Chargers.

The Baltimore Ravens beat the Tennessee Oilers 21-19 in the last game to be played at 43-year-old Memorial Stadium while Chicago beat St Louis 13-10 in a basement battle.

GOLF

Cup captaincy can wait says Montgomerie

Colin Montgomerie believes that Europe's golf authorities should delay naming their Ryder Cup captain until just weeks before the event in the United States in 1999. The Scot believes that is the only way to get the best man at Brookline, Boston.

"There's no reason why we can't delay the decision for months," Montgomerie said yesterday. "We don't need a captain until the event starts. Why do we need one during the qualification system? He won't tell us what to do at that stage. There's no rush."

"We don't have the likes of a Hale Irwin, a Ben Crenshaw or Tom Kite. The Americans have a choice of 10 or 12 of that type of character."

"And while Sam Torrance and Mark James spring to mind, they want to play. It's a terrible thing to take the captaincy and possibly accept that means you're finished as a player. You could tell it hurt Seve Ballesteros. He still wanted to play."

Ballesteros, who led Europe to victory in his home country of Spain in September, has ruled himself out as captain next time, as has Bernhard Langer.

Montgomerie wants a system where the likes of Torrance and James could try to qualify as a player but if they did not, could then take on the reins of the captaincy. The Scot sees himself taking on the role in around eight years' time but first his main aim is to win that elusive major.

Having just won his fifth successive European Order of Merit at the age of 34, he maintains he has finally come to

terms with his reputation as the man with the shortest fuse in golf.

"I'm learning the hard way that nobody has played the perfect game of golf yet and know I never will," Montgomerie said.

"Nowadays, if I miss a putt, I miss one. We're all human and I know I can possibly win a major with 90 per cent of my game. Players have won majors making mistakes. I can three-putt a green and win a major. I almost have done."

"I used to get upset with myself as I knew I could do better. I just have to accept the bad with the good, which I am doing as I get older."

Whatever he achieves personally, Montgomerie believes golf has a money-laden future as Tiger Woods takes the sport to the level of American baseball and basketball, where the likes of Michael Jordan earn £100m a year.

"There's only one guy in that league at present and that's Woods," Montgomerie said. "But we are all likely to benefit from his success and with US Tour Commissioner Tim Finchem trying to get golfers to earn the same as other top US stars, you'll see a lot more \$1m first prizes in future."

Montgomerie, who won the European Order of Merit for the fifth successive time this year, has the chance of the first \$1m (£620,000) prize of 1998 when he faces the South African Ernie Els in the semi-finals of the Andersen Consulting Challenge in Phoenix on 3 January.

— Frank Marley

PHILIPS

FOOTBALL



Today we publish the updated results of The Independent Fantasy Football League. The player scores are for all League games played until Sunday 14 December. The league table includes all scores up to 7 December. This month's winner is Mr David Lewis from Reading with his team *The Magnificent 11*. A total of 132 points wins him a pair of tickets to England's next home international.

Every time one of your players score you get four points. There are four points for a keeper or a defender every time their team keeps a clean sheet. If a player scores the winning goal, i.e. if there is a one goal difference in the scoreline, the player scoring the final goal for the winning team is awarded 1 bonus point awarded in addition to standard goal related points. Each successful Assist, a pass judged by our experts to lead directly to a goal, will give a player 3 points. The opinion of our experts on the matter is final. Each player selected and starting a game will be awarded one point.

If a player is given a Yellow Card they lose 1 point, if a player is given a Red Card they lose 3 points. Own goals, either scored or conceded, do not count.

The Premiership Manager that you choose will be awarded 3 points if their real-life team wins, 1 point is awarded if they draw and no points are given if they lose.

Updated player scores and league tables will be published every Tuesday in *The Independent* and repeated the following Sunday in the *Independent* on Sunday.

HOW TO SCORE			
player score	4	points	
clean sheet	4	points	
winning goal	1	point	
successful assist	3	points	
yellow card	-1	point	
red card	-3	points	
manager's team wins	3	points	
draw	1	point	

INDEPENDENT FANTASY FOOTBALL

LEAGUE TABLE

POS	NAME	TEAM	POINTS
1	Miss Lisa Wild	Amerreco AFC	631
2	Mr Archer	No Wright	623
3	Mr B Sari	The Uncontrollable	617
4	Mr D Aston	Billy Boy's 2nd II	617
5	Mr J McCrossan	Washed Up Army	617
6	Mr C King	Seeking Victory	613
7	Mr P Tuffe	Pins 4 Ups	613
8	Mr D Evans	Boothens Boys End Old Boys	613
9	Mr J Cox	Southville FC	613
10	Mr B Sari	Simply The Best	612
11	Mr A Boyle	Wembley Bundlers	610
12	Mr A Wingrove	Tony's Brace	610
13	Mr T Baker	Diana's Demons	610
14	Mr D Lyons	Deja Vu	608
15	Mr S Scott	Unbeatable	605
16	Mr Brady	Look Lively	605
17	Mr M Pawley	Robert's Rovers	604
18	Mr C Thomas	Scotchrope Extras	604
19	Mr K Boyle	Clogston Rovers	599
20	Mr S Scott	The Dream Team	598
21	Mr I Brown	Ruffus	596
22	Mr A Choudi	Nickies 9th II	596
23	Mr T Russ	Sanny's Soccer Scorchers	596
24	Mr J Sak	One Watt City	596
25	Mr J McCrossan	Washed Up Army	595
26	Mr D Edmington	Edmo United	595
27	Mr Kierley	The Killer Bees	594
28	Mr F Henderson	Secondary Celtic	594
29	Mr D Baker	Dead Beat	593
30	Mr G Bell	Summing Shorts	593
31	Mr T Brazier	Wow For Short	593
32	Mr C Milin	Grimsbys Fish	590
33	Mr J Cox	Retro Rovers	590
34	Mr P Green	Powis Rangers	589
35	Mr D Brockroyd	Jack's Lads	589
36	Mr M Ward	Team A 40	588
37	Mr R Rickard	Aller Lambeg	588
38	Mr R Sheridan	The Frank Large Fan Club	588
39	Mr G Ford	Linthorpe Rovers	587
40	Mr S Coulton	PJ United	587
41	Mr T Robson	Rebecca's Rovers	587
42	Mr S Man		586

POS	NAME	TEAM	POINTS
1	Mr S Scott	Unbeatable	605
2	Mr Brady	Look Lively	605
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An Addington reminder from Richards

Gordon Richards is on the Gold Cup trail with Saturday's Haydock winner The Grey Monk. However, as the Greystoke trainer tells Richard Edmondson, he has another live contender for Cheltenham.

If it had not been for the popular vote on May Day you could have been excused for believing this was a grey year. The hue has certainly been hugely advantageous to this National Hunt season.

RACING'S FUTURES MARKET

Bells Life, 10/11 lengths third to Senor El Butruti in the 2m5f Tripleprint Gold Cup Handicap Chase at Cheltenham on Saturday, is 10-1 with Ladbrokes - William Hill offer 2-1 - for the Welsh National.

Senor El Butruti is 20-1 with

Sunny Bay has won a Hennessy, Kelcey a Bula Hurdle on his stomp up the ante-post betting for the Cheltenham Gold Cup. If he cannot get his teeth into the surface there next March it will be no-go.

The nine-year-old still has a greater chance of appearing at Prestbury Park than the trainer's name horse, One Man. Festival spectators will be lucky to see him at all. "The grey horse certainly won't be in the Gold Cup and whether he'll go to Cheltenham at all I don't know," Richards said yesterday. "It's only 50-50 that we'll run him in the Queen Mother (Champion Chase) as there are plenty of other good races for him."

— Ian Davies

It is Richards's opinion and that of John Hales, the gelding's owner, that One Man does not last the Gold Cup journey. The messages that Richard Dunwoody, his rider, receives are

RICHARD EDMONDSON
NAP: Cheeky Charlie (Folkestone 2.30)
NB: Master Mario (Hereford 3.10)

Man turns from armour-plated tank to dangley marionette in the closing stages. Dunwoody's opinion is that animals that collapse as drunkenly as One Man does are not guilty of failing to stay; but are victims of internal bleeding. "The barrier he hit could be in his mind," the jockey observed in a recent Christmas book collaboration with Marcus Armytage. "I always wonder if at Sandown back in January [1996], when he won his first King George, he went to the extreme. I know he gave his all."

"He was very tired and blew hard. Maybe he went to the limit and just maybe he's not that keen to go there again. He's an

intelligent enough horse to know where the limit is."

There is no limit for Gordon himself however, and even if he cannot swing through the trees at Greystoke any more he is still going strong at 67. "I still love the old horses you know, you never lose that," he said. "As long as my head keeps working I'll be all right. I hear some of these younger boys with their new ideas and I take some on board and I ignore others."

"But I've still got a few ideas of my own and as long as I can find someone to do the brawn while I do the brains then we'll go on. You never know it all. You keep learning."



Richards: still going strong

Gordon, it seems, will never be divorced from racing, and even when he goes he will probably ensure his final resting place lies where horses hooves are resounding just above him. As it stands, his record does not contain a Gold Cup winner, but he believes that may be corrected in three months' time. The identity of the saviour may surprise some.

Addington Boy was withdrawn on the eve of the Gold Cup last season, and has recovered from tendon trouble. He was as low as 8-1 last March when his sick note was accepted. He is a sound jumper, albeit with no bottom-pitching turn of pace, though his record is seven wins, two seconds and a third from 10 completed starts over fences. He has no enemies among his regular backers.

"Let's not forget about Addington," Richards said. "You only have to look at him to see he has improved since last year. I'm very, very pleased with him. In view of this assessment, 20-1 looks quite plump with William Hill and the advice is to invest some coppers. I should."

ICE HOCKEY

McCaig given four-month ban for biting linesman

Superleague disciplinary chiefs yesterday banned the Newcastle Cobras defender Rob McCaig until 15 April and fined him £1,000 for biting the Cardiff linesman Moray Hanson on his right arm last Thursday.

The incident occurred late in the Express Cup match and he was originally given a suspension of at least five games for roughing and gross misconduct for physical abuse of an official. But the league reviewed video evidence of the incident and decided that McCaig, a Canadian making his fifth appearance for the team, should be punished more severely. The British Ice Hockey Association has supported the judgement, ensuring that McCaig will not be eligible to play in any other British competition this season.

Sheffield Steelers' bruising battle with Nottingham Panthers on Sunday night is to be investigated by the disciplinary committee following a mass brawl which led to seven players being dismissed.

Punches were exchanged following a bench clearance in the third period with Steelers 4-0 down to Nottingham Panthers at the Sheffield Arena. Three home players - Corey Beaulieu, Scott Allison and Mike Ware - were dismissed by the referee Mike Rowe along with Panthers' Jeff Sebastian and Craig Nienhuis.

Rowe dismissed both teams to their dressing-rooms for five minutes to cool off, but when play resumed, the Steelers captain, Rob Wilson, clashed with Derek Laxdal and both players were also ejected. A record 301 Superleague penalty minutes were handed out with Panthers going on to win 5-0. The previous record was 192 minutes.

The Steelers manager, Alex Dampier, said: "Sticks got up around the net and the next thing I knew, things had started. I felt they left the bench before we did. It's a bad thing to happen when you're losing. We'll get some suspensions out of it and deservedly so."

A Superleague spokesman said: "All the video evidence will be studied, but everything depends on the referee's report. Once everything is collated it will then be sent to Richard Borey [director of sport] and the disciplinary committee."

HOCKEY

Brown's saves make it easier for Eastcote

Eastcote, leaders in the ESL South Premier, returned to winning form in their last game before the Christmas break with a 3-2 win at Bournemouth where they owed much to goalkeeper Dan Brown for a string of fine saves, including a penalty stroke with the score at 1-1.

A penalty corner goal from Danny Geach set Eastcote on their way in the 10th minute, but although Nick Lygo-Baker quickly equalised, Jon Curtis put the Middlesex side back in the lead before the interval. The former Cambridge University captain Adrian Carter put them further ahead before Tim Stainer pulled a goal back for Bournemouth to set up a worrying final 10 minutes for Eastcote.

Tim Prior, with a well-timed hat-trick, inspired High Wycombe to a 3-1 win away at Ramgarth and, with Chichester being held to a 3-3 draw at Timbridge Wells, into second place. City of Portsmouth were in goalkeeping mood against newly promoted Purley with a 7-3 win which took them into third place.

Purley, who swept all before them last season to win promotion, have found the going particularly tough in the Premier where they have been badly handicapped by the retirement of Paddy Osborn, their goalscorer, who has a wrist injury. He joined them last year from Reading after he had been the first to 150 National League goals.

Stuart Avery was again on form for Portsmouth with a hat-trick, while Richard Penrose and Rob Boswell both scored two goals each.

— Bill Colwell

Welsh National Handicap Chase (3m 5f 110yds)				
Horse (Trainer)	Coral	William Hill	Ladbrokes	Total
Cyffwrdd (M Popham)	7-1	7-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (M Popham)	7-1	7-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (M Popham)	7-1	7-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (M Popham)	7-1	7-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (M Popham)	7-1	7-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (M Popham)	7-1	7-1	5-1	5-1
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Indira (M Popham)	7-1	7-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (M Popham)	7-1	7-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (M Popham)	7-1	7-1	5-1	5-1

Each-way a quarter the odds, places, 1, 2, 3, 4 (Cheltenham, Saturday, 27 December)

1998 Triumph Hurdle (2m 1f)				
Horse (Trainer)	Coral	William Hill	Ladbrokes	Total
Reckless (M Pops)	7-1	7-1	5-1	5-1
Buddy Marvel (D Roche)	20-1	20-1	14-1	20-1
Kilnham (C Roche)	20-1	20-1	14-1	20-1
Sealed Approval (A Foster)	20-1	20-1	14-1	20-1
Sealed Approval (A Foster)	20-1	20-1	14-1	20-1
Sealed Approval (A Foster)	20-1	20-1	14-1	20-1
Sealed Approval (A Foster)	20-1	20-1	14-1	20-1
Sealed Approval (A Foster)	20-1	20-1	14-1	20-1
Sealed Approval (A Foster)	20-1	20-1	14-1	20-1
Sealed Approval (A Foster)	20-1	20-1	14-1	20-1
Sealed Approval (A Foster)	20-1	20-1	14-1	20-1

Each-way a quarter the odds, places, 1, 2, 3 (Cheltenham, Thursday, 18 March)

King George VI Chase (3m)				
Horse (Trainer)	Coral	William Hill	Ladbrokes	Total
One Man (C Richards)	evens	4-5	5-6	5-6
Seal (C Brock)	100-30	5-2	3-1	5-2
Seal (C Brock)	100-30	5-2	3-1	5-2
Seal (C Brock)	100-30	5-2	3-1	5-2
Seal (C Brock)	100-30	5-2	3-1	5-2
Seal (C Brock)	100-30	5-2	3-1	5-2
Seal (C Brock)	100-30	5-2	3-1	5-2
Seal (C Brock)	100-30	5-2	3-1	5-2
Seal (C Brock)	100-30	5-2	3-1	5-2
Seal (C Brock)	100-30	5-2	3-1	5-2
Seal (C Brock)	100-30	5-2	3-1	5-2

Each-way a quarter the odds, places, 1, 2, 3 (Cheltenham, Friday, 19 December)

1998 Champion Hurdle (2m 110yds)				
Horse (Trainer)	Coral	William Hill	Ladbrokes	Total
Indira (A P O'Brien)	11-2	5-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (A P O'Brien)	11-2	5-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (A P O'Brien)	11-2	5-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (A P O'Brien)	11-2	5-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (A P O'Brien)	11-2	5-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (A P O'Brien)	11-2	5-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (A P O'Brien)	11-2	5-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (A P O'Brien)	11-2	5-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (A P O'Brien)	11-2	5-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (A P O'Brien)	11-2	5-1	5-1	5-1
Indira (A P O'Brien)	11-2	5-1	5-1	5-1

Each-way a quarter the odds, places, 1, 2, 3 (Cheltenham, Tuesday, 17 March)

1998 Cheltenham Gold Cup Chase (3m 2f 110yds)				
Horse (Trainer)	Coral	William Hill	Ladbrokes	Total
Donna Prida (H Houghton)	5-1	5-1	5-2	5-1
Donna Prida (H Houghton)	5-1	5-1	5-2	5-1
Donna Prida (H Houghton)	5-1	5-1	5-2	5-1
Donna Prida (H Houghton)	5-1	5-1	5-2	5-1
Donna Prida (H Houghton)	5-1	5-1	5-2	5-1
Donna Prida (H Houghton)	5-1	5-1	5-2	5-1
Donna Prida (H Houghton)	5-1	5-1	5-2	5-1
Donna Prida (H Houghton)	5-1	5-1	5-2	5-1
Donna Prida (H Houghton)	5-1	5-1	5-2	5-1
Donna Prida (H Houghton)	5-1	5-1	5-2	5-1
Donna Prida (H Houghton)	5-1	5-1	5-2	5-1

Each-way a quarter the odds, places, 1, 2, 3 (Cheltenham, Thursday, 18 March)

RESULTS

NEWCASTLE

12.40: 1. NOBLE NORMAN (P Mwen) 65-1; 2. The River 12-1; 3. Adam Scott 3-1; 4. The River 12-1; 5. Adam Scott 3-1; 6. The River 12-1; 7. Adam Scott 3-1; 8. The River 12-1; 9. Adam Scott 3-1; 10. The River 12-1; 11. Adam Scott 3-1; 12. The River 12-1; 13. Adam Scott 3-1; 14. The River 12-1; 15. Adam Scott 3-1; 16. The River 12-1; 17. Adam Scott 3-1; 18. The River 12-1; 19. Adam Scott 3-1; 20. The River 12-1; 21. Adam Scott 3-1; 22. The River 12-1; 23. Adam Scott 3-1; 24. The River 12-1; 25. Adam Scott 3-1; 26. The River 12-1; 27. Adam Scott 3-1; 28. The River 12-1; 29. Adam Scott 3-1; 30. The River 12-1; 31. Adam Scott 3-1; 32. The River 12-1; 33. Adam Scott 3-1; 34. The River 12-1; 35. Adam Scott 3-1; 36. The River 12-1; 37. Adam Scott 3-1; 38. The River 12-1; 39. Adam Scott 3-1; 40. The River 12-1; 41. Adam Scott 3-1; 42. The River 12-1; 43. Adam Scott 3-1; 44. The River 12-1; 45. Adam Scott 3-1; 46. The River 12-1; 47. Adam Scott 3-1; 48. The River 12-1; 49. Adam Scott 3-1; 50. 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FOOTBALL

Curbishley staying at Charlton

Charlton have warned West Bromwich Albion not to poach their manager Alan Curbishley as they seek to replace Ray Harford.

Albion have been linked with Curbishley following Harford's departure for Queen's Park Rangers last week, but a statement from Charlton yesterday made it clear that Curbishley will not be leaving.

"Charlton would like to make it clear that Alan, who recently signed a new extended contract, is staying at The Valley," the statement ran. "Whilst the club is flattered that Alan is being coveted by other clubs, he feels positive about the future of Charlton and wishes to see through to its fruition the job he has already started."

Liverpool moved swiftly yesterday to denounce reports linking Liverpool's Robbie Fowler with a move to Arsenal. A Liverpool spokesman said: "This really is fantasy football. Robbie is not for sale and is not going to be allowed to leave this club. He is Liverpool through and through."

Liverpool were concerned about a second bout of rumours surrounding Fowler in the past few weeks. Fowler is on a five-year contract that still has four years to run, and when the 22-year-old signed his new deal it was made clear that Liverpool were prepared to lengthen that offer by another three years.

The Derby defender Christian Dailly could be out of action for 10 to 12 weeks after fracturing his jaw during the draw at Bolton on Sunday. The Scotland international was injured in a clash with Bolton's Amar Gununlaugsson. An x-ray later revealed the former Dundee United man had fractured his jaw. He will undergo

an operation before having his jaw wired and bolted at Bolton Royal Infirmary.

Everton's new signing Mitch Ward is doubtful for Saturday's trip to Leicester after taking two heavy blows on his right ankle during his side's goalless draw with Wimbledon at the weekend.

Southampton have pulled out of a bid to sign the former England full-back Tony Dorigo from Italian club Torino. The Southampton manager Dave Jones has blamed the Bosman ruling for his failure to bring the 31-year-old former Leeds and Chelsea player back to England.

"We were interested but we would have owed Leeds money and it all fell through without us even speaking to the player," Jones said.

Middlesbrough's 18-year-old winger Anthony Ormerod has signed a new four-and-a-half year contract, committing him to the First Division leaders until the summer of 2002. Ormerod's England Under-18 team-mate Andrew Campbell, also 18, has agreed to sign a similar deal.

The Internazionale striker Maurizio Ganz will move from the Italian league leaders to Milan the two clubs agreed yesterday. Ganz, 29, will bolster a Milan attack that has flourished since the season and is now without the Liberian star George Weah, who will be out for a month with a back injury.

In exchange, Milan agreed to give up its rights to acquire winger Francesco Moriero from Inter at the end of the season. In 136 Serie A matches with Inter, Atalanta and Sampdoria, Ganz has scored 49 goals. But he has just two league goals this season, and has not played for a month.



Boys from Brazil: A newly shorn Juninho (left) watches from the bench as his side draw 0-0 with Australia in the Confederations Cup Photograph: Empics

McLintock backs Wenger's revolution

Frank McLintock, the former Arsenal captain, believes Arsène Wenger can pull the Gunners out of their present slump and still inspire a Premiership title challenge by reminding his Continental flair with the British basics which worked so well under George Graham.

Wenger's French revolution at Highbury was all the rage earlier this season when Arsenal reeled off a dozen unbeaten League matches and defied the critics who said he had too many players who were too old.

But Arsenal have lost four of the last six and were jeered off by their own fans at the end

of a humiliating 3-1 home defeat by Blackburn Rovers last Saturday.

Wenger virtually admitted he does not know what has gone wrong, but McLintock, captain of the famous Arsenal Double winners in 1971 and still a passionate Arsenal fan, insisted: "What he does know is that they cannot have become a bad team overnight."

"I'm not going to knock Arsène Wenger because this man has a record and a reputation which shows he is one of the finest coaches in the world. I wouldn't dream of trying to tell him how to do his job because that's just an easy way for people

to get headlines in the papers. "But I hope he will understand that I'm speaking from the heart and with the best intentions for him and Arsenal when I say he's got to get back to the nitty-gritty of the team's traditional strengths to get them going again."

McLintock, now working as a pundit, added: "He has some tough decisions to make but I think he will be brave enough to make them."

"And I'm not talking about wholesale changes in personnel. It cannot be done just like that, no matter what money you have to spend. Everybody point-

ed to Arsène Wenger's quality when things were going well. Now he's got to show that the old ability to bounce back is still there."

"I've loved the way he has made Arsenal such an exciting team to watch. Change has to happen and he encouraged the players to show their creative ability, but Dennis Bergkamp and Ian Wright are still so important to that ideal and at the moment they are both off the boil."

"When that happens, as it does now and again to all top players, you've got to revert to the basics - and make sure that even when you are not playing

well you are still difficult to beat. "I think Blackburn have now got it down to a tee. To me, they are the new Arsenal or even the new Liverpool - the way Liverpool were when they won all their trophies under Bill Shankly and Bob Paisley."

"The ideal is a balance between the best of British and European styles and it has been achieved by Alex Ferguson at Manchester United - playing with style but also competing with great desire."

"But Arsenal still have the players to be a force. I don't agree that they are too old yet because age doesn't matter if you show you can still do it."

SAILING

Whitbread yachts stay in close contact

The cards are still being shuffled for the nine Whitbread Round the World yachts in the Great Australian Bight and no one has yet been dealt what looks like a winning hand. The computer says that Toshiba is closest to Sydney but, with over 1500 miles to go and 10 miles separating the first seven, racing is tight for the whole fleet almost for the first time in the race.

All the yachts are heading south-easterly at approximately the same speed with the most significant difference being the spread of about 60 miles from north to south.

The back marker, but also the most southerly, is Kaut Frostad in Innovation Kvaerner, racing hard again after repairing a damaged mast. "It's hopefully an investment worth paying for early," he said.

Paul Cayard, the skipper of Sweden's EF Language, was in the lead and also the most northerly yacht. He reported that the first 40 hours of the leg had been as tough as any he had sailed.

Cayard also reported a problem with his mainsail, which was doubly unusual as the all-woman crew on sister-ship EF Education suffered the same damage. Cayard claimed 15 minutes for a repair. Christine Guillou said it took an hour.

The skipper of Merit Cup, Grant Dalton, feared for the fleet with upwind conditions making sailing very difficult, but predicted the fleet would have some relief in next few days.

"No way can you call the last 24 hours pleasant when yesterday was filled with constant tacking in fresh wind, no sleep for the boys and lots of water flying around," Dalton said.

"The boat is very wet down below and only today will meal times start to be popular again."

Gunnar Krantz, the winner of the 1996 Volvo Ocean Race, was another troubled skipper. He asked for a change in the rules against sailing the water-ballooned 60-footers upwind, and limiting the number of tacks they could make on any one leg.

— Stuart Alexander

RUGBY LEAGUE

Leicester City FC keen to stage league

Rugby League administrators are considering audacious plans to take the 13-a-side code into the union territory of Leicester Tigers.

Leicester City, the Premiership football team, are keen to stage rugby league at Filbert Street, only a short distance from Tigers' Welford Road home.

Sir Rodney Walker, the Rugby Football League chairman who is also chairman of the public company that owns the football club, would like to take a Super League fixture to Filbert Street to test the waters.

"The people at Leicester City have indicated to me that, if the opportunity arose, they are serious about staging rugby league," Sir Rodney said. "It would be premature to contemplate them applying for a

Super League franchise but, if two teams were interested in taking a fixture to Leicester, it could be used as a means of establishing the level of interest."

The Midlands is among the targets for Super League expansion, with bids for 1999 Super League franchises due to be considered next May.

Angry officials of the new Oldham club are to seek legal advice after being told they will not be included in this season's Challenge Cup. The decision to omit Oldham, who were Cup winners as far back as 1899, from the game's best-known knock-out competition was taken by League officials after the old club went into liquidation and before the launch of the new club.

"Decisions had to be taken in early November when Oldham

were not in existence," an RFL spokesman, Peter Rowe, said.

The Oldham chairman, Christopher Hamilton, who claimed he was told by a reporter on Sunday night that his club would not be in the Cup, said: "We will be seeking advice. There has been a total lack of communication at the RFL since we first submitted our business plan."

The other 18 First and Second Division clubs join 22 amateur survivors from this weekend's second-round ties in the third round on 31 January. The 12 Super League teams join at the fourth round on 14 February.

A winding-up petition against Batley was lodged in the High Court yesterday by the former chairman Trevor Hobson, who claims he is owed £85,000.

RUGBY UNION

'Slight improvement' in Gwyn Jones

Gwyn Jones, the Wales captain, is said to be comfortable after spending a third day in hospital after suffering a serious neck injury during Saturday's game against Swansea.

The 25-year-old Cardiff flanker suffered a compressed spinal cord when he was trapped at the bottom of a ruck and complained of having no feeling in his arms and legs. He is being constantly monitored by doctors at the University Hospital of Wales and a spokesman said: "He is having extensive treatment and there has been a slight improvement."

The Leicester hooker, Richard Cockerill, celebrates his 27th birthday today with a recall to the side for the Allied Dunbar Premiership match at Richmond.

CRICKET

England players to stake claim

England's players have their last chance to stake their claim for a place in Thursday's crunch World Cup game against Australia when they face Ireland in Pune, India, today.

Having gained the maximum 18 points from the first three of their five pool matches, England will be confident that their unbeaten record against the Irish will remain intact. England lead Australia in their pool by three points, while Ireland trail on nine.

And England know the Australians will provide their sternest test in their quest for a third World Cup title. Their captain, Karen Smithies, said: "Everyone seems to think it will be between us and them, both in the group and for the trophy."

England's batsmen have impressed in their three matches so far, twice scoring more than 300 runs with two players bagging centuries.

But they have allowed all three opponents - South Africa, Pakistan and Denmark - to complete their allotted overs, while Australia took only 37 balls to beat Pakistan and 28.5 overs to dispense with South Africa. Their match against Ireland was rained off.

Smithies, however, is unperturbed by the statistics and said: "We have had to work harder in our games and been able to learn from our mistakes. "But we need to reduce the extras tomorrow. I, and probably others, was guilty of not concentrating when Pakistan were batting against us. We must put that right tomorrow."

TODAY'S NUMBER

11

The police officers injured in disturbances after Napoli went down to their ninth defeat in 12 games in Italy's Serie A on Sunday. The Napoli fans responded to a 4-0 defeat by Parma by burning anything they could find on the terraces of the San Paolo stadium.

SPORTING DIGEST

American football

NFL: Atlanta 20 Philadelphia 17; Baltimore 21 Tennessee 12; Jacksonville 20 Buffalo 14; Cincinnati 10 Dallas 20; Indianapolis 41 Atlanta 10; Detroit 14 Minnesota 13; NY Jets 31 Tampa Bay 0; Green Bay 21 Carolina 10; New Orleans 27 Arizona 12; Oakland 21 Kansas City 20; San Diego 7; Chicago 13 St Louis 10.

AMERICAN FOOTBALL CONFERENCE

EASTERN DIVISION

Team	W	L	T	F	A
Atlanta	9	6	0	327	273
New England	9	6	0	355	277
NY Jets	9	6	0	338	274
Buffalo	8	0	0	234	335
Indianapolis	8	2	0	285	362

CENTRAL DIVISION

Team	W	L	T	F	A
Baltimore	11	4	0	366	291
Cincinnati	9	5	0	374	309
Tennessee	8	1	0	317	304
Baltimore	8	1	0	312	329
Cincinnati	6	9	0	339	291

WESTERN DIVISION

Team	W	L	T	F	A
Kansas City	12	3	0	350	219
Denver	11	3	0	417	320
Seattle	8	0	0	327	353
Oakland	4	1	0	353	357
San Diego	4	11	0	335	357

NATIONAL FOOTBALL CONFERENCE

EASTERN DIVISION

Team	W	L	T	F	A
NY Giants	9	5	1	287	298
Washington	7	1	0	292	257
Philadelphia	6	1	0	285	337
Dallas	5	0	0	237	294
Arlington	5	12	0	254	353

AMERICAN DIVISION

Team	W	L	T	F	A
Tennessee	12	3	0	391	261
Tampa Bay	10	3	0	368	248
Minnesota	8	7	0	345	331
Chicago	8	11	0	348	380

WESTERN DIVISION

Team	W	L	T	F	A
San Francisco	12	2	0	332	210
Atlanta	8	0	0	284	333
Carolina	8	0	0	247	324
St Louis	7	8	0	224	302
New Orleans	4	11	0	269	341

through to play-offs, 1 won Division

Basketball

NBA: Seattle 107 LA Clippers 101; Atlanta 93 Sacramento 88; Vancouver 110 Houston 105; LA Lakers 110 Dallas 88.

Worthing Bears' debarment in the Budweiser League continued yesterday.

Boxing

Adnan Dodson, the Guyana-born fighter who is self-managed, has finally realised his hopes of a pay-day after 19 months when he challenges Ronald Wright, of the United States, for the World Boxing Organisation light-middleweight championship at the London Arena on Friday.

Cricket

SCREWFOX DIRECT LEAGUE Premier Division: Macclesfield v Poulton Rovers. LEAGUE OF WALES GILBERT SHIP Cup and Round second legs: Bayview 0 v Barry 12 (7/30).

ALLIED DUNBAR PREMIERSHIP ONE: Richmond v Leicester 80/0.

Basketball

EUROPEAN CUP: Roudot (Ger) v Exide London Towers (Fro).

Australia seven-a-side squad (to tour South America): D Campbell (capt), R Connelly, B Dunn, V Gordon, N Grogan, C Hughes, N Lavelle, J Moss, R Nelson, S Reaqui, S Stupaculis.

Sliding

Jure Kosir, of Slovenia, was the surprise leader of a floodlit men's World Cup slalom yesterday after he clocked 55.70 seconds in his first run. "It felt perfect today and I'm just glad I can still ski like that after all the problems I've had in recent years," he said after eclipsing the 56.27 set by the Austrian defending World Cup champion Thomas Sikora. Kosir's solitary World Cup success was in 1993 at Madonna di Campiglio, also in Italy. He took a bronze medal in the 1994 Olympics but has won nothing since. Sikora held on to second ahead of the Norwegian Finn Christian Jagge on 56.35 but Austria's other great hope, the Olympic champion Thomas Stangassinger, had to settle for 21st with a disappointing 57.88. The local hero Alberto Tomba, back on the piste where he won his first World Cup races 10 years ago, skied cautiously to record 57.50 for 17th. Tomba has said this will be his last World Cup race at Sestriere and wants a good result to dedicate to his late friend Giovanni Agnelli, the heir to the Fiat car empire who died of cancer aged 63 on Saturday. Kristian Bjornsson, the Icelandic skier who came from nowhere to claim second place in the first slalom of the season at Park City, Utah last month, skied out early in the first leg.

Golf

WORLD RANKINGS (US unless stated): 1 B Norman (Aus) 1148pts (inc. 2 T Woods 1076; 3 N Price (Zim) 951; 4 E Els (SA) 895; 5 D Love (Ire) 839; 6 C Montgomerie (GB) 838; 7 P Medhurst (GB) 835; 8 M O'Connell (Ire) 805; 9 M O'Meara 798; 10 T Lehman 787; 11 J Sorenstam 787; 12 D Ford 687; 13 S Hoch 685; 14 B Facon 666; 15 N Faldo (GB) 644; 16 V Singh (Fiji) 642; 17 S Eklund (Aus) 640; 18 P Winkle 636; 19 T Mielton 547; 20 F Couples 547.

Hockey

WHL: San Jose 2 Chicago 1; Philadelphia 3 Tampa Bay 0; Phoenix 3 Detroit 3 (p).

Rugby Union

David Campese, who retired from international rugby after this year's World Cup, says he has agreed to captain Australia in seven tournaments in Argentina and Uruguay next month.

Sports awards

Greg Rusedski and Denise Lewis were yesterday named as the 1997 Sportsman and woman of the year by the Sports Writers' Association of Great Britain. Rusedski follows Sunday's rights triumph in the BBC Sports Personality of the Year to become the first tennis player to receive the SWA award.

Snooker

The German Open's future hangs in the balance after sports governing body the World Professional Billiards and Snooker Association, reached the

Will backup become the new rock-n-roll?

We can't promise to make it that interesting, but the new HP Colorstar 5GB tape drive is certainly a star performer! It will back up 2GB in just 36 minutes. And it's by far the easiest to use with supremely user-friendly software for full PC system protection. Exactly what you've come to expect from Hewlett-Packard. And all for just \$150! For full details ring HP now.



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Former rock singer and American property tycoon seek Portsmouth talks

A former rock musician and an American property tycoon may join forces in an attempt to take control of Portsmouth Football Club. Mark Pierson reports

Brian Howe, the former lead singer with the Bad Company rock group, is to hold talks this week with the Portsmouth director, Martin Gregory, with a view to buying a stake in the cash-strapped club.

Howe, a lifelong Portsmouth

fan whose family still live in the area, has at his disposal the financial backing of an American property tycoon, Vince Wolanin. Howe was at the First Division club's defeat at Ipswich on Saturday after flying in from his home in Florida to spend a week in Britain.

He will meet with Gregory, who owns 46 per cent of the shares in Portsmouth and whose sale of a further 51 per cent share to the chairman, Terry Venables, recently reached a stalemate.

A Portsmouth spokeswoman said yesterday: "We can confirm that Mr Gregory will be having

talks with Mr Howe this week, although we cannot go into detail until there is something to announce."

"Mr Howe's intentions have been well documented, but as to what might happen in terms of the club's future or stadium, we don't really know quite yet."

Howe said at the weekend: "Vince is very interested in doing a deal - building a stadium primarily. We have to sit down with the owners of Portsmouth Football Club and decide if the price is right."

A deal is not believed to be imminent because Wolanin, who earned his fortune build-

ing sports stadiums in the United States, is set to meet Gregory in Paris next month.

The issue of whether Venables will finally take up his 51 per cent share in the Fratton Park club has also still to be settled when he returns from his involvement with the Australian national side in the Confederation Cup tournament in Saudi Arabia.

Dozens of police and supporters were injured as violence erupted during four Serie A matches in Italy on Sunday. The incidents occurred at Naples, Milan, Bologna and Bergamo.

The worst clashes were in

Naples, where Napoli face relegation to Serie B after being beaten 4-0 by Parma. Napoli fans responded to the side's ninth defeat in 12 matches by burning anything they could find on the terraces of the San Paolo Stadium and then clashing with police. Eleven police officers were injured in the incidents.

A mob of 30 hooligans tried to breach the entrance to Napoli's changing rooms, but were fended off before reinforcements arrived. Police had to use batons and tear gas to bring the situation under control, cars

had their windscreens smashed by rocks and Parma's team coach was pelted with eggs.

Napoli's new coach, Giovanni Galeone, said: "I can understand people's anger. The fans who care passionately about the side behave like a lover who has been betrayed."

"And when that happens, people insult each other and it can even sometimes lead to shooting and stabbing."

Napoli's Argentine skipper, Roberto Ayala, said: "I'm sorry for the fans. They had been all too patient up to now."

There was trouble, too, at San Siro after the league lead-

ers, Internazionale, beat Roma 3-0. There were scuffles during the game and baton-wielding police had to charge the Roma fans after the match. About 16 supporters and police officers were injured.

A man was also injured after being hit by a firework at Bergamo, where Atalanta fans had nearly prompted the closure of the stadium after going on the rampage two months ago.

A police charge was also needed at Bologna to prevent local fans from attacking visiting Lecce supporters in a square outside the stadium immediately after the game.

The tension had started even during the match, when a firework was thrown by Lecce fans after an hour's play into a nearby section of the ground occupied by Bologna supporters.

Police had to move in quickly to separate the two groups of rival supporters after Bologna's 2-0 win, but stones were thrown and rubbish bins upended during the disturbances.

The Celtic goalkeeper, Jonathan Gould, aged 29, has signed a three-and-a-half year extension to his contract which will keep him at Parkhead until 2002.

CRICKET

England enjoy a field day as Hollioake takes charge

Derek Pringle reports from Sharjah
England 215-9
Pakistan 207
England win by 8 runs

At first it appeared like a typical tale of England woe with Pakistan, their side packed with spicy wrist and finger spinners, bamboozling an England team chock full of meat and potato all-rounders - or as their coach, David Lloyd, prefers to call them, multi-dimensional players. But while England's batsmen were mostly made monkeys of, their bowlers, backed by some of the best fielding in England colours, consigned Pakistan to the also-rans, with a thrilling eight-run victory here yesterday.

However, with England possessing the comforting buffer of a superior run-rate, the excitement of such a close finish was somewhat diluted. In fact, when they had prevented Pakistan winning by the start of the 44th over, they had qualified for the final.

The win did possess an added incentive though and while it neatly kept their unbeaten record intact it also ensured that they would not meet Pakistan again, at least not here. Instead, England now await the outcome of today's game between India and the West Indies to see who they play in the final on Friday, though India need to win by something in the region of 80 runs to have any hope of joining them.

With everything having gone

swimmingly, this game was always going to be Adam Hollioake's sternest test to date. Posting a moderate total of 215 to defend against Pakistan, the most talented side in the competition, England's novice captain was bound to come under the microscope.

But if his dismissal, when England were wallowing, possessed some of the foolhardiness of youth, he marshalled England's fightback on the field with skill, courage and determination. Once again it was his and Matthew Fleming's nerveless "death" bowling that sealed the team's win after the No 9, Azhar Mahmood, threatened to win the game for Pakistan.

Facing the penultimate over, with 18 runs needed, Mahmood took nine runs off the England captain's, first four balls, as blockhole deliveries failed to find their mark. Pressure though, can work both ways and with two balls of the over left, Mahmood skied a steeper, which Stewart, running round, safely pounced at mid-wicket.

Next ball it was all over as Saqlain Mushtaq failed to beat Stewart's quicksilver gloves when the batsman hesitated over taking a leg-bye. The win, England's third close one in a row, is bound to have taken its toll on the nerves of Lloyd. For the players though, the experience will toughen as much as it saps, and only persistent gremlins in the batting, have so far made this team look vulnerable.

For once England's pinch hitting plan came off in spades, and 76 were plundered from the

first 15 overs. Alistair Brown, the thumper of the opening pair, towed Alec Stewart along in his slipstream, his flashing blade taking heavy toll of Pakistan's opening bowlers, including a mighty on-driven six off Wasim Akram. After he had gone, popping up a bat-pad catch to the keeper off Surrey team-mate Saqlain Mushtaq, Stewart continued the momentum. Sashaying down

the pitch, he struck sixes off both leg-spinners, each one as crisp and clean as spring lettuce leaf.

With the hundred up, England were looking well-placed for a total around 240 when Manzoor, in the side primarily as a batsman, bowled Stewart with a googly from around the wicket. By exploiting the rough in this way, both Manzoor and Mushtaq were able to shackle England's middle order who found anything other than singles, extremely difficult to come by.

It does not take long in one-day matches for such pressure to translate into wickets and Manzoor, with his flat trajectory

and awkward turn, took three of the next four wickets to fall as England squandered their speedy start.

But if Hick was the only one who can consider his demise unlucky - bowled off his thigh sweeping - the dismissal of Graham Thorpe was the most doltish on an afternoon that saw more than one England batsman compete for the dunce's cap. Having already turned down Hick's request for a second run, Thorpe, who had turned blind and was several steps down the pitch, was then run out himself, ducking under Ijaz's long throw. While England's long line of

all-rounders gave Saqlain catching practice, the wily off-spinner took his tally of one-day wickets for the year to 69, beating the old record of 65, which he set last year.

Pakistan have played 37 one-day games so far this year, about three times England's annual tally. Nevertheless, Saqlain is a remarkable bowler who has taken off-spin on to another plane, with a mystery ball that appears to kick away from right-hander, like a leg-break. It certainly made cuckoos of Kent's pair of all-rounders Ealham and Fleming, though judging by Saqlain's growing tally, they are not alone.



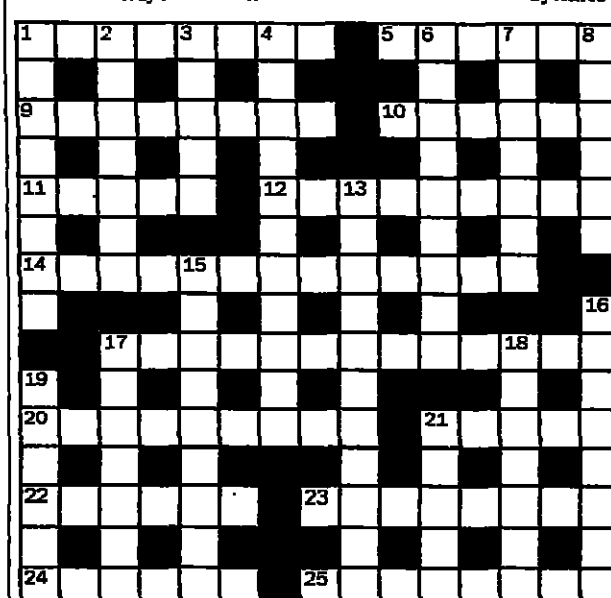
Dougie Brown celebrates the wicket of Pakistan's Shahid Afridi on the way to England's eight-run victory in Sharjah yesterday

Photograph: Stu Forster/Allsport

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3483, Tuesday 16 December

By Aled



Monday's Solution

PICKUP OF COURSE
WORCESTER ASCOT
SMASHED ONTARIO
HILLARY
OSRIC TUDOR
A E M U P
WELL DONE SURE
HERITAGE SUGAR
E N N U H C A
THIEF OUR FATHER
Y N U T E L E C
ORGANIST BLOTCH

ACROSS

- 1 Playing fiddle certainly is a successful activity (5,3)
- 5 Backward slave with company depicted in painting (6)
- 9 However a mass of hair will need support (8)
- 10 Outrage at bad finish (6)
- 11 Expression of surprise at railway vehicle (5)
- 12 Short book is on time of auxiliary soldier (9)
- 14 Speaking of signets? (4,9)
- 17 Loathsome person where golfer wants to be in course? (4-3-4)
- 20 Maybe small change is needed to drink brewed char (9)
- 21 One said to flatter local wildlife (5)

DOWN

- 2 Prayer of hunter about son (6)
- 3 Desire to take in a gulf state is appropriate for a lady (8)
- 4 Interest in phrase to occur in 50% of instances (6)
- 5 I take subsequent action to identify false worshipper (8)
- 1 None in a busful of characters is very good (8)
- 2 Hold spellbound in umpteenth rally (7)
- 3 A hat for the race (5)
- 4 Pre-occupation with sailor's pulling power (11)
- 6 Something to look up about receiver that pic-

tures the Queen (9)

- 7 Speculations about one European group of animals (7)
- 8 One's into hot today being an unusual type (6)
- 13 Little time to unite divided support (5-6)
- 15 Perhaps knell for those perishing? (5,4)
- 16 Finds source, in Homer oddly, of figure of speech (8)
- 17 Mark is name in a shirt that's lost (7)
- 18 Old copper on panel of eye specialist (7)
- 19 Pal upset old doctor's equanimity (6)
- 21 Thresh about as one in bad fall (5)

SHARIAH SCOREBOARD

England won toss	England	Pakistan
A D Brown c Mohd b Saqlain	41	10
14 A Saqlain b Manzoor	47	10
16 A Saqlain b Manzoor	48	10
18 A Saqlain b Manzoor	49	10
20 A Saqlain b Manzoor	50	10
22 A Saqlain b Manzoor	51	10
24 A Saqlain b Manzoor	52	10
26 A Saqlain b Manzoor	53	10
28 A Saqlain b Manzoor	54	10
30 A Saqlain b Manzoor	55	10
32 A Saqlain b Manzoor	56	10
34 A Saqlain b Manzoor	57	10
36 A Saqlain b Manzoor	58	10
38 A Saqlain b Manzoor	59	10
40 A Saqlain b Manzoor	60	10
42 A Saqlain b Manzoor	61	10
44 A Saqlain b Manzoor	62	10
46 A Saqlain b Manzoor	63	10
48 A Saqlain b Manzoor	64	10
50 A Saqlain b Manzoor	65	10
52 A Saqlain b Manzoor	66	10
54 A Saqlain b Manzoor	67	10
56 A Saqlain b Manzoor	68	10
58 A Saqlain b Manzoor	69	10
60 A Saqlain b Manzoor	70	10
62 A Saqlain b Manzoor	71	10
64 A Saqlain b Manzoor	72	10
66 A Saqlain b Manzoor	73	10
68 A Saqlain b Manzoor	74	10
70 A Saqlain b Manzoor	75	10
72 A Saqlain b Manzoor	76	10
74 A Saqlain b Manzoor	77	10
76 A Saqlain b Manzoor	78	10
78 A Saqlain b Manzoor	79	10
80 A Saqlain b Manzoor	80	10

Simpson talks to India about coaching post

The former Australian captain and coach Bob Simpson yesterday denied that he had signed up with India to help their 1999 World Cup campaign, but admitted that was interested in helping the country in a part-time capacity.

Earlier Jayant Lile, the secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, announced that Simpson had been appointed technical consultant ahead of the World Cup in England. The BCCI president Raj Singh Durgapuri said Simpson was expected in India in February.

However Simpson said he had discussed the job but nothing

had been decided. "I certainly had some discussions with them when I was in India recently acting as International Cricket Council referee but I haven't been officially informed, nor do I know anything about the appointment," Simpson said.

"They asked me whether I'd be interested in an involvement in coaching India and I said not on a full-time basis, but I would consider doing some consultancy work," Simpson said.

If he accepted the BCCI's offer Simpson would find himself working against the Australians in a Test series in India next year. "I don't think that would be any

real problem, I'd only be there on a consultancy basis to assist them to do certain things.

"They are a team with an enormous amount of talent and I think they can do a lot better, I really do."

Simpson said his contractual arrangement with the Australian Cricket Board required him to visit every state at least once a year in whatever capacity the states required.

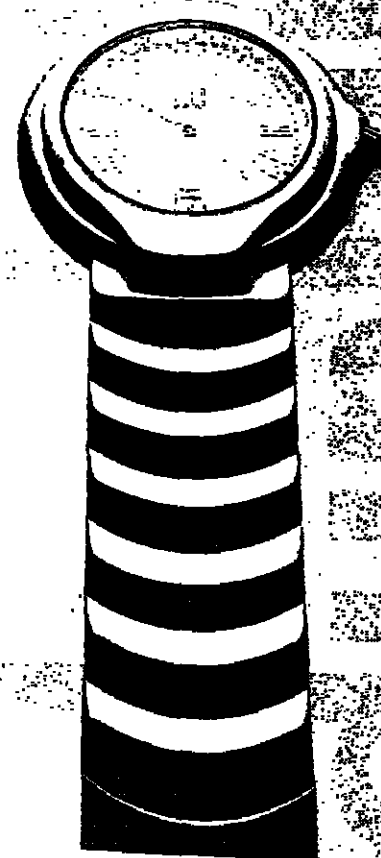
He coached Australia for the best part of a decade, guiding them to a win in the 1987 World Cup and the final in 1996 before being replaced by Geoff Marsh last year.

Published by Newspaper Publishing PLC, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 3DL, and printed at Mirror Colour Print, 8k Albion Road, Walford

Back issues available from Historic Newspapers, 01988 840370

Tuesday 16 December 1997 Registered as a newspaper with the Post Office

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